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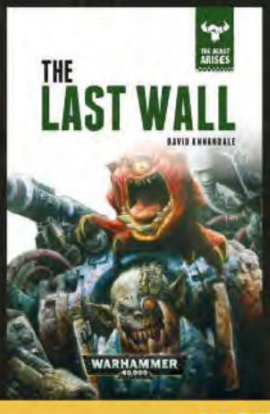




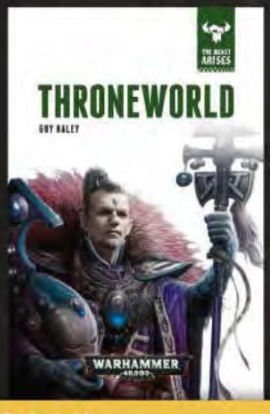


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Rants & Raves

INSIDE THE *SFX* HIVE MIND

RICHARD EDWARDS
EDITOR



RAVES

→ Really excited about *Daredevil* season two. Let's just agree to write off that weekend now...

→ Really happy Bryan Fuller will be at the helm of the new *Star Trek* show – a great choice.

RANTS

→ How am I going to wait until December 2017 for *Star Wars VIII*? It's NEARLY TWO YEARS!

NICK SETCHFIELD
FEATURES EDITOR



RAVES

→ Excited for Bryan Fuller's *Star Trek*. Never convinced by the argument it's a franchise whose true home is TV – those original cast movies are great – but the small screen will definitely let them take more chances.

→ Started an *Avengers* Blu-ray marathon. Diana Rigg's ironic twinkle is something else in hi-def.

IAN BERRIMAN
REVIEWS EDITOR



RAVES

→ Skimming through a new *Firefly Dictionary And Phrasebook* has reminded me how much I loved the show.

→ The @batlabels Twitter account is a simple idea but fun.

RANTS

→ How bad was the first episode of *The X-Files*? It was everything I had been dreading.

WILL SALMON
ACTING NEWS EDITOR



RAVES

→ Two comics: Rob Williams and Michael Dowling's *Unfollow* is a social media-themed thriller. Si Spencer and Dix's *Klaxon* is like David Lynch directing an episode of *Coronation Street*.

RANTS

→ I'm excited for the future, but I'm gonna miss Moffat's *Who*.

RUSSELL LEWIN
PRODUCTION EDITOR



RAVES

→ Reading James Goss's novelisation of *Who* story "City Of Death": a tad too much embellishment but I'm enjoying it.

RANTS

→ The real controversy of awards season should have been that neither *The Force Awakens* nor *Inside Out* were even nominated for Best Film Oscar.

JONATHAN COATES
ART EDITOR



RAVES

→ Great to have Mulder and Scully back on our screens again. Don't mind that the first episode's script was a bit of a muddle, the second more than made up for it. Happy they've stuck with the original titles too.

RANTS

→ What's next for DC's hip new Hanna Barbera reimagining, *The New Shmoo* as a Snapchat logo?

CATHERINE KIRKPATRICK
DEPUTY ART EDITOR



RAVES

→ Feels good to have *The X-Files* back on our screens.

→ Love the posters NASA has done promoting the future of space travel: http://bit.ly/sfxposters.

RANTS

→ Finally given up on *Lucky Man*, it just got too ridiculous. London looks lovely though.

ADRIAN HILL
AD MANAGER



RAVES

→ I was lucky enough to spend a week in New York recently, and paid a visit to the *Star Wars* Costume Exhibition in Times Square. The work that goes into creating such iconic clothing is astonishing. Also visited Jay & Silent Bob's Secret Stash store, and they sell *SFX*! Thanks to John and Tina Kanopka for their hospitality.

RHIAN DRINKWATER
SUB EDITOR



RAVES

→ Just caught the *Agents Of Shield* episode "4,722 Hours" – that was actually good! Much better than the series I've been used to...

RANTS

→ BBC, what are you doing with *Doctor Who*? Nothing new until Christmas?! And announcing a showrunner who won't actually be making a series for two years?

NIC CLARKE
WRITER



RAVES

→ Great to hear *Jessica Jones* is getting a second season. Best on-screen Marvel to date, and I'll fight anyone who says otherwise.

→ Only three months until the new Guy Gavriel Kay novel, *Children Of Earth And Sky*.

RANTS

→ *The Expanse*. Good stuff, but please – enough grey already.

*Aside from *The Lego Movie*



Marvel may currently be top dogs when it comes to putting superheroes on the big screen, but DC is fighting back. Batman and Superman are arguably the most recognisable comic book characters on the planet, and the idea of the duo uniting on the big screen for the first time* is such a big deal that the reveal of the hybrid Bat/Supes logo was enough to turn the crowd at San Diego Comic-Con 2013 into a frenzy for a movie they'd have to wait nearly three years to see.

That wait is very nearly over, of course, so we've spoken to director Zack Snyder, and stars Ben Affleck and Henry Cavill, about squaring up in *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice* (p48).

Also in this packed superhero-themed issue, top comics writers Grant Morrison and Scott Snyder argue the respective cases for Supes and Bats (p56), we find out what's in store for season two of *Daredevil* (p58), the legendary Stan Lee tells us how to make a superhero (p68), Mark Millar looks back at the *Civil War* that inspired April's new Captain America movie (p72), and we preview the hottest superhero films swooping into a sky near you (p62).

There's so many of them you really ought to subscribe to *SFX* to help you keep up with all the action. This month new subscribers bag themselves a pair of *Star Wars* Pop! Vinyl figures – why haven't you turned to p46 already?



See me on page 123

Rich

Richard Edwards, Editor
@RichDEdwards

RICH'S PICTURE BY OLLY CURTIS

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ON SET!

STAR INTERVIEWS

MYSTERY MEN

Salutations to *Houdini & Doyle*, a period *X-Files* with a celebrity historical twist

The idea that history's most famous escapologist, Harry Houdini, and the literary legend who created Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, not only met but became friends may seem a rum conceit. A fanciful notion, conceived by peddlers of absurd adventures. And yet it happened, for real.

Don't, however, expect ITV Encore's new series *Houdini & Doyle* to be a docudrama. The fact that in real life the two chaps didn't meet until 1920 whereas the series is set in 1901 is evidence enough that historical accuracy isn't much of a concern here. Instead it runs with the idea of Houdini and Doyle as a →

Highlights



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FRONTIER QUEEN
→ Demon hunter Wynonna Earp is moving from comics to telly.



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HE'S NOT THE MESSIAH...
→ But is the grown-up Damien a very naughty boy?



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ANIMAL CRACKERS
→ Turns out Mulder isn't the only fox to appear in *SFX*.

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SCI-FACT! While living in Southsea, Conan Doyle played for Portsmouth FC as their goalkeeper under the pseudonym AC Smith.

> It's not a biopic about Houdini or Doyle. It's about them as celebrity sleuths

kind of Edwardian Mulder and Scully, assisting Scotland Yard with its more curious cases.

"It's not really a biopic," laughs Michael Weston (Houdini). "It's not *about* Houdini or Doyle. It's about them as celebrity sleuths."

Weston, star of such US shows as *House* and *Six Feet Under*, appears alongside Stephen Mangan (*Dirk Gently*, *Episodes*) as Doyle. The *House* connections don't stop with Weston. It's executive produced by *House* creator David Shore, and written and created by his long-time collaborator David Hoselton along with Canadian screenwriter David Titcher. It's a lavish British/Canadian co-production filming in Manchester and Toronto.

The two stars are clearly having a blast bringing these larger-than-life historical personalities to the screen. When Red Alert chats with them on the set in Manchester, Weston is wearing a patterned waistcoat that, we point out, reflects the ornate furnishings in the set for his London apartment.

"Yeah, I hadn't noticed that, but yeah," he admits. "Aren't the sets great though?"

"It's like time travel," chips in Mangan. "I was driving round in a 1904 Wolseley the other day. I was like Toad of Toad Hall."

Both actors agree with the *X-Files* parallel, especially as – reflecting the views of the real-life Houdini and Doyle – the escapologist is a supernatural sceptic and the author is the believer. This makes for perfect in-built conflict.

"There's a lot of back and forward repartee as we have disagreements about spiritualism and stuff," says Weston. "The arguments they have are fraught but they're smart. It's a period piece but I think it's very relevant to our time. What is real? What is magic?"

"Plus you're a confident and brash American and I'm an emotionally constipated Brit," adds Mangan with a grin.

As Mangan points out, Doyle's desire "to believe" partly stems from the fact that, "He's got some really heavy duty things going on in his life. But stiff upper lip and all that. His wife is in a coma and dying. He's desperate to know he'll be able to talk to her when she goes."

This doesn't mean, though, that Mangan's Doyle is a credulous character. "Doyle believes in the spiritual, but he wants to prove it scientifically. He wants evidence."

Doyle has other issues to contend with too. "He's got writer's block," says Mangan. "This is after he retired Holmes. A lot of people are upset that I killed Holmes off. The police can't bear the books because they make them look like idiots."

The real Houdini, meanwhile, went from being a medium to going on a crusade to out them as fakes. He knew the tricks of the trade because he used them himself. "I want to make sure that Doyle's not going to propagate this nonsense and take advantage of people that are naive enough to believe in all this stuff. I am the most recognisable figure of the time saying, 'This stuff isn't real! Don't fall for it.'"

"They see each other as a nut to crack," says Mangan. "For Houdini it's like trying to turn Putin gay."

The two are tight-lipped about how they come together in the series and how their involvement – official or otherwise – with Scotland Yard works out but Mangan does reveal, "We've already met before the show starts. We know of each other and we have met before but we haven't really got to know each other. The conceit is that there's a case with a supernatural element. A ghost is accused of killing nuns in a convent. So I've gone along to speak to the police – because this is right up my street – to see if I can maybe be a part of this investigation."

"And Houdini comes storming in as well," adds Weston.

So, *is* there a supernatural element to the show or is it all smoke and mirrors?

"Most of the time the supernatural element is disproved," teases Mangan. "But some things are then left open."

"We're off to Derbyshire to meet aliens next week," he adds, almost as an afterthought.

The truth is bally well out there, what ho!

Houdini & Doyle starts transmitting on ITV Encore in the spring.



Or is our photo upside down and Houdini's the right way up...?



Stephen Mangan is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Michael Weston is Houdini.





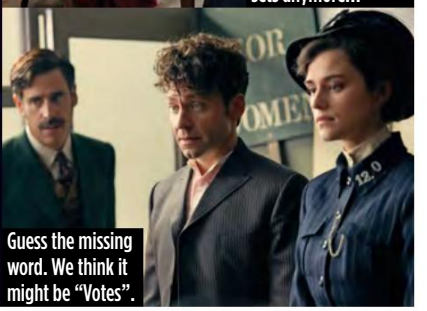
What's that lad doing? He should be up a chimney!



Rebecca Liddiard is first policewoman Adelaide Stratton.



Well, *Jekyll And Hyde* doesn't need these sets anymore...



Guess the missing word. We think it might be "Votes".

REWRITING HISTORY

Facts and revisionism: creating the warped and wonderful reality of *Houdini & Doyle*

A WOMAN'S WORK

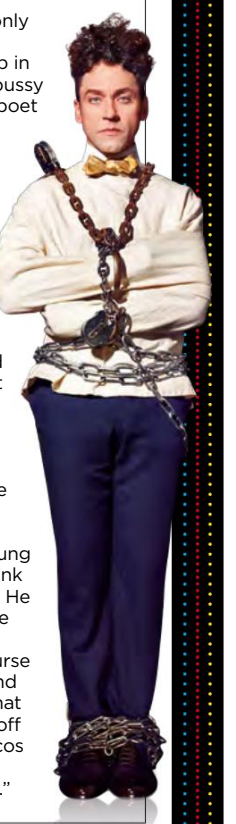
→ Canadian actress Rebecca Liddiard co-stars as Constable Adelaide Stratton, who in the series is described as the first female PC ever to work for the London Metropolitan Police Force. In reality, the first female police officer in the Metropolitan Police was Sofia Stanley in 1919. She also designed the first women's police uniform, known as the Stanley uniform. Other coppers we meet in the series include Tim McInnerny (*Blackadder*) as Inspector Horace Merring and fast rising star Adam Nagaitis (*Banished*, *Happy Valley*) as Sergeant George Gudgett. Shame he's not an Inspector...

SETTING THE STYLE

→ The pilot episode of *Houdini & Doyle* is directed by Stephen Hopkins who directed the really not-very-good space opera remake *Lost In Space* (1998). However, since that turkey his career has "done a Danny Cannon": Cannon directed the similarly awful Stallone *Judge Dredd* (1995) but then went on to become a respected pilot director on US TV. Following the same career trajectory, Hopkins has put Blawp firmly behind him to successfully launch such hit shows as *24* and *Californication*.

OTHER CELEBRITY HISTORICALS

→ Houdini and Doyle aren't the only real-life famous historical personalities who'll be turning up in the show. Composer Claude Debussy (played by Shane Crehan), Irish poet WB Yeats (Stuart Adams), and inventor of the phonogram and movie camera Thomas Edison (Peter Outerbridge) all turn up like it's some kind of Edwardian celebrity panel show. There's also an appearance by Sherlock Holmes, played by Ewen Bremner, which will no doubt be a very different performance to Benedict Cumberbatch's. And we bet you're now thinking, "But hang on... Sherlock Holmes wasn't real. Was he...?"



ESCAPING THE PAST

→ Michael Weston reveals that he was required to recreate one of Harry Houdini's most famous staged escape routines. "They hung me upside down in that water tank for real – it really was terrifying!" He also reveals that Houdini's unique skill set comes into play in often unexpected ways during the course of the series: "He's a magician and he's an escape artist and all of that plays into the series... He pisses off the police with his escape stuff cos he's always getting out of their handcuffs which shows them up."

SCI-FACT! **The Wynonna Earp comic debuted in 1996 with a five-issue run. It has since had two sequel series.**



SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

HOME ON THE STRANGE

Executive Producer Emily Andras tells all about Wild West mash-up *Wynonna Earp*

Move over Ash, the Winchester brothers stand down... There's a new gunslinging demon hunter in town and her name is Wynonna Earp.

Based on IDW Publishing's comic of the same name, the new TV series from Syfy finds Wyatt Earp's great granddaughter working as a member of a covert division of the US Marshals created to combat all the things that go bump in the night. When Wynonna, played by Melanie Scrofano, returns to her hometown of Purgatory, she must confront her past, family legacy and the supernatural.

"With so many people who have a take-no-crap attitude, there's often a tragedy that it's covering," says executive producer Emily Andras. "Wynonna is a person who did not get to choose her own fate and has made some terrible choices. There's also something really interesting about being the descendant of a hero. If you, yourself, are not naturally heroic, that name can be both a blessing and a curse."

Wynonna and her dysfunctional posse – which includes Doc Holliday (Tim Rozon), Agent Dolls (Shamier Anderson), and her younger sister, Waverly (Dominique Provost-Chalkley) – frequently come into conflict with the Revenants. This bunch of redneck ghouls are stuck in Purgatory and decide to raise a little hell to pass the time. In addition, they share a personal connection with Wynonna's legendary ancestor, which brands her a target.

"It turns out that these demons are every single outlaw that Wyatt Earp ever put down," explains Andras. "Through some very strange circumstances, both Wyatt Earp and these poor suckers that he killed have been cursed. They literally have a curse put on them where they resurrect over and over again. They are forced to battle each other in this never-ending cycle of violence.



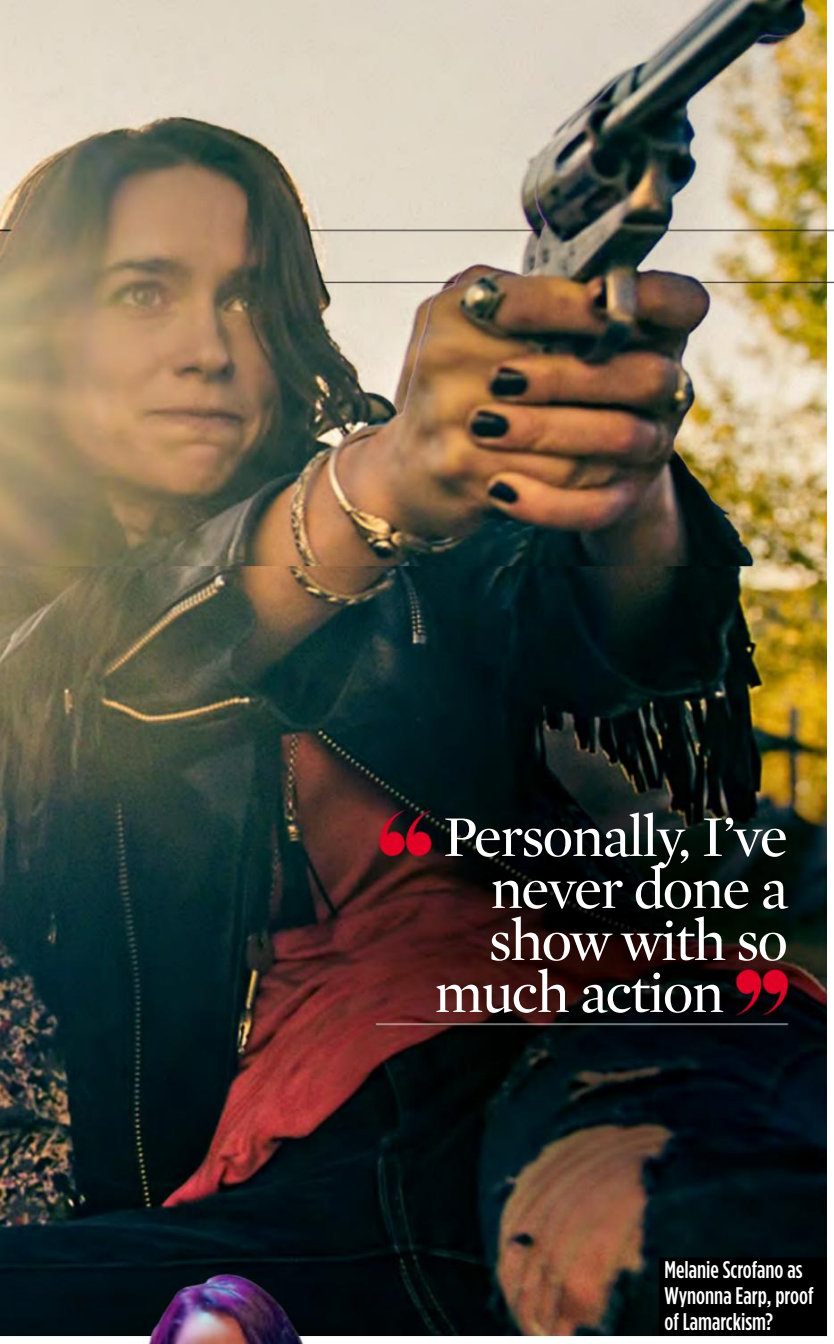
What do they think this is, a Frankenstein movie?



"The only way to end it is either for the Earp heir to kill all the demons or for the demons to figure out a way to escape their earthly prison," continues Andras. "They are bound within a very specific area, so they can't actually leave. And, like many criminals, some of them want to kill Wynonna or the Earp family. Others want her to stay out of their way so they can pursue their criminal enterprises."

Andras describes the show as "*Justified* meets *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*", which immediately evokes images of Wild West shenanigans, shootouts, strong women and paranormal mayhem. Indeed, the recent promos promise *Wynonna Earp* will deliver in all those departments, especially the action.

"For the fight scenes, we really wanted it to look both kickass and fun and have a certain tone," says Andras. "We wanted to take it



> "Personally, I've never done a show with so much action"

Melanie Scrofano as Wynonna Earp, proof of Lamarckism?



"Get your poncho on, you're nicked!"

seriously, but we also wanted to make it darkly comic. I really wanted it to be more like a Robert Rodriguez movie. Personally, I've never done a show with so much action. As soon as you have people firing guns at one another, it's a whole different level of commitment. I can't speak highly enough about our stunt coordinator, Steve McMichael, who worked on *The Hobbit*. The action for this is extraordinary and I'd say we're definitely batting above our pay grade, which makes me really happy." ●

Season one of Wynonna Earp premieres on Syfy in the US on 1 April with a UK airdate TBC.

AERIAL ASSAULT

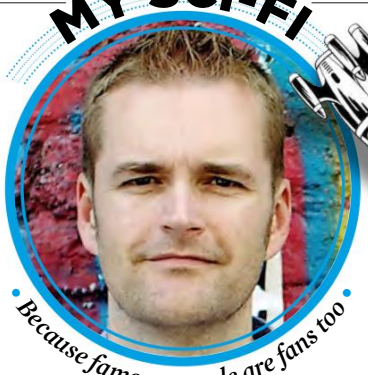
SCI-FI TV ROUND UP

→ **Bryan Fuller signs on as the showrunner of CBS's new Star Trek series.**



→ **Jackie Earle Haley has been cast in Preacher as Odin Quincannon.**
→ **Netflix green-lights a 10-part series based on Richard Morgan's Altered Carbon.**
→ **Rick And Morty season three likely delayed until 2017.**
→ **Dougray Scott has joined the cast of Fear The Walking Dead.**
→ **The Flash will be speeding over to appear in an episode of Supergirl.**
→ **The population of Twin Peaks has grown, with Naomi Watts and Tom Sizemore joining season three.**
→ **Doctor Who series 10, Steven Moffat's final hurrah, to begin filming in May.**
→ **The X-Files season 10 delivers monster ratings in both the US and UK.**
→ **Dark Hedges – the road in Northern Ireland used as Game Of Thrones' Kingsroad – has been accidentally painted with white lines!**

MY SCI-FI



Because famous people are fans too

TIM WEAVER

THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE ***DAVID RAKE*** BOOKS IS A DEDICATED GENRE FAN

Favourite SF/fantasy film

→ Aged six, *Return Of The Jedi* was the first film I ever saw at the cinema, so the original *Star Wars* trilogy will always loom large. Then, as a teenager in the late '80s and early '90s, I shifted to a diet of comic books, horror movies and action films, which is why *Aliens* had such an impact on me – it's a perfect combination of at least two of those things. I constantly rewatch *The Thing*, not least for Rob Bottin's still-extraordinary effects, and I've seen *RoboCop* hundreds of times – it's super-smart, it looks and feels amazing, and Clarence Boddicker is one of the all-time great screen villains.



Favourite SF/fantasy TV show

→ I was a big, big fan of the miniseries and the first two seasons of *Battlestar Galactica*. I loved the template so much – this intergalactic chase thriller, full of paranoia and mistrust, where no one ever felt safe. After that incredible episode where Galactica freefalls onto New Caprica, I felt the show lost some of its focus and momentum, but I still think those first two-and-a-bit seasons are hard to top.



Favourite SF/fantasy book

→ *I Am Legend*. Richard Matheson had an enviable imagination. I grew up reading him, Ira Levin and Stephen King. Levin's *This Perfect Day* is fantastic – it's full of great writing and sinister, prescient themes.

Favourite SF/fantasy guilty pleasure

→ *Predator*. But is it still a guilty pleasure if you genuinely think it's brilliant?

What Remains by Tim Weaver is out now in paperback and ebook.

DON'T QUOTE ME

"I WAS TAKING NOTES AND I HAD THIS YELLOW LEGAL PAD AND I JUST REMEMBERED WRITING IN ALL CAPS, 'MASSIVE PROBLEM'."

Game Of Thrones co-creator David Benioff on his reaction to the show's never-aired pilot episode.



© BILL WATERS (1), REX

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SCI-FACT! ***Damien*** **overwrites the continuity established in the (fairly shonky)** ***Omen*** **sequel films.**



STAR EXCLUSIVE

Bradley James's Damien wants to photograph your soul...

GOOD OMENS

The star of the new *Damien* TV show tells all about the antichrist's return...

Watch out for lightning conductors, be extra-careful around plate glass... The antichrist is back in *Damien* – a 10-part TV sequel to cinematic horror classic *The Omen*. *Merlin*'s Bradley James takes the lead as the now adult son of Satan, though intriguingly the character is not yet aware of his Luciferian heritage...

"We meet Damien on his 30th birthday," explains James. "He's a war photographer and he's been doing that ever since he left school. He's very good at it, largely due to the fact that he always seems to be in the right place at the right time. The question the audience will be asking is whether the right shots appear because he knows where to go or because he's there in the first place..."

As Damien struggles with his true nature, forces will be pushing him to accept his hellish origins. "He is still unaware of the darkness within, but he's already aware his life isn't straightforward," says James, though he hopes that viewers might root for Damien as well as fear his powers. "There will be different camps. Some people will be for Damien. Some will be very much afraid of him."

The Omen featured many disturbing moments, including Damien's nanny committing suicide and that lightning rod impalement. James promises plenty of scares in the show as well as nods to the original film.

"My mum isn't going to be able to watch this," he laughs. "But I don't think it's going to be scary in the straightforward sense. There are dark moments, but at the same time, it's not all-out horror. It's all part of the darkness following Damien."

Damien airs on A&E in the US from 7 March, with a UK airdate TBC.

AFTERLIFE

CELEBRATING ICONIC SCI-FI STARS

114

ARMIN SHIMERMAN

Quark in Deep Space Nine



He played Pascal in *Beauty And The Beast* and Principal Snyder in *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, but actor Armin Shimerman will forever be best known to legions of *Star Trek* fans as Quark, the morally flexible Ferengi in *DS9*.

Would you like to play the role again?
→ If the opportunity comes up I will snatch it and do it at a moment's notice.

What's the strangest request you've had from a fan?
→ I was doing a convention in Phoenix, Arizona, and a little boy, about eight years old, raised his hand and asked, "What's it like to be an action figure doll and do you ever play with yourself?" It just brought the house down. I of course made no answer whatsoever and just smiled. That is, without doubt, my favourite question.

Would any of your character's skills have been useful in real life?
→ Quark, unlike Armin Shimerman, is a very gregarious people person. He likes to talk to people. He likes to hobnob. He likes the conviviality of social intercourse. Armin is a rather shy person, and Quark sort of bought Armin out from underneath his shell.

Did you get any souvenirs from the set?
→ Luckily one of the set designers very kindly gave me a present of just a little square of Quark's Bar. I can't even tell you where it came from, but it's certainly part of the bar.

What would it say on his tombstone?
→ He gave the best he could.

GETTY (1)

SCI-FACT! **Harewood, an MBE, describes J'onn J'onzz as "the first thing I've done that my kids have been absolutely glued to".**

FIVE MINUTES WITH...

DAVID HAREWOOD

Supergirl's Martian Manhunter on embodying a comics icon...

TO BOLDLY GO...

"In *Smallville* you only saw one little shot of him being green. But we're showing you the full Martian Manhunter and giving you his full story. People are flipping out online, and I love that. It feels like a responsibility that people are putting on me, saying, 'At last we're seeing one of our favourite DC characters.'"

MAKING A MARTIAN

"I have this fantastic suit that I love putting on, my superhero suit. The head is CG. It's a bit like what Andy Serkis did with Gollum. The performance is me, but it is digitised. But, as much as we can, the producers and everybody very much want to see the emotional side of the story being played by me the actor.""

THE KARA CONNECTION

"He has always had this goal of protecting Kara. So if it means tough love, it means tough love. Her becoming a superhero is probably the last thing he wanted. Because he knows it's gonna put her in danger."

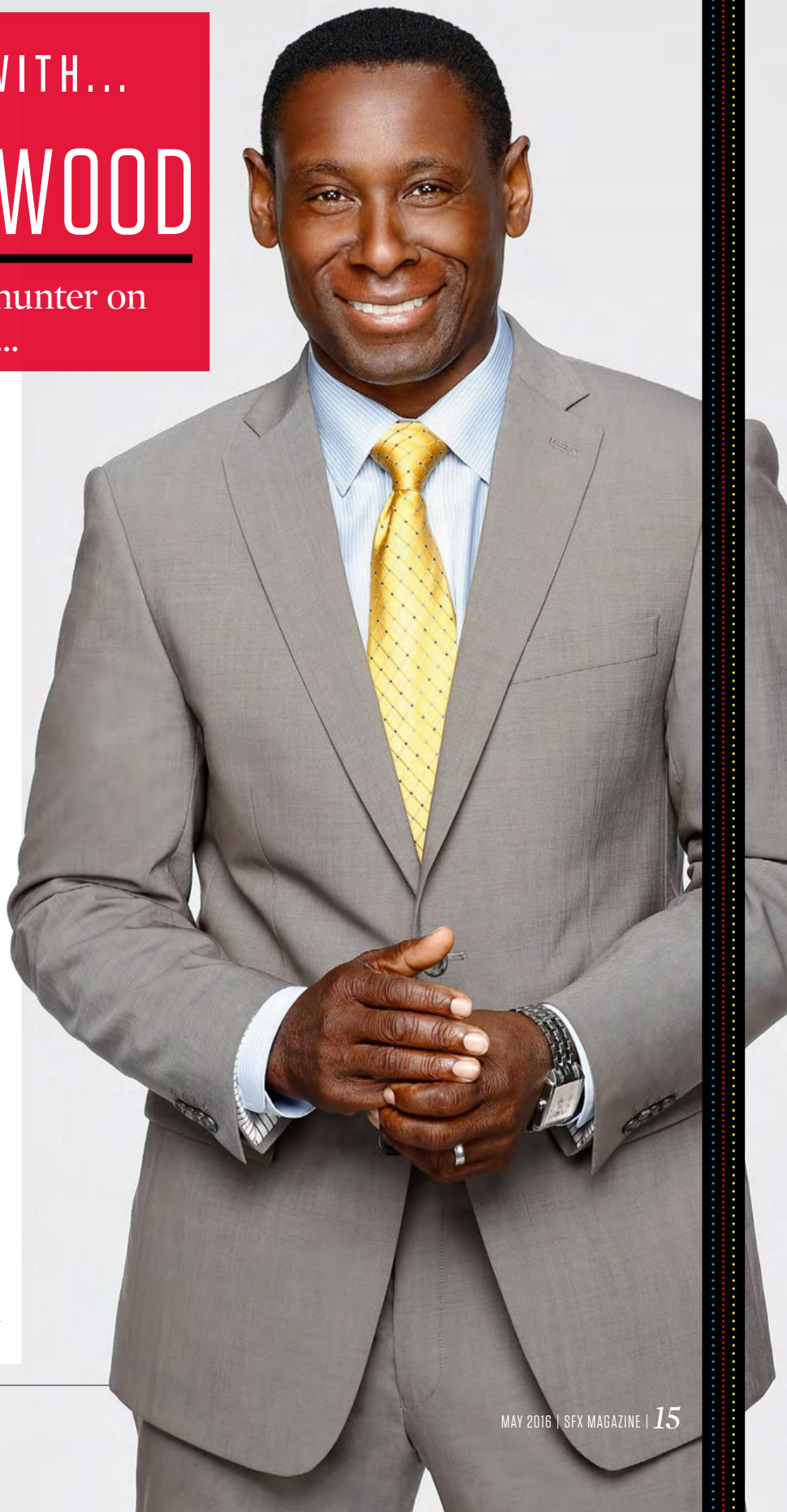
COMIC BOOK CULTURED

"In England I really didn't read the *Justice League*. I was much more of a Stan Lee person. So this has been a revelation to me. I'm really loving the character of J'onn J'onzz. Especially [writer] John Ostrander's stories."

AN ENGLISHMAN IN LA

"My family's in England. So I'm here [in LA] on my own a lot. That sense of loneliness, that sense of isolation that he feels – it was definitely something that I tapped into. In the comic books, it's almost like he's having this constant dialogue with himself. That's exactly what I do when I'm wandering around LA [laughs]!"

Supergirl airs on Sky 1 in the UK and CBS in the US.



GETTY

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SCI-FACT! **Baxter is penning a sequel to *The War Of The Worlds – The Massacre Of Mankind* is out early 2017.**



Next stop, Jupiter.

AUTHOR EXCLUSIVE

UPDATING THE FUTURE

Alastair Reynolds on collaborating with Stephen Baxter for their Arthur C Clarke sequel, *The Medusa Chronicles*

According to Alastair Reynolds, it's down to "sheer serendipity" that he ended up collaborating with Stephen Baxter. The duo were exchanging emails when Reynolds, off the cuff, suggested working together on a sequel to Arthur C Clarke's novella *A Meeting With Medusa*. "Steve fired back saying, 'That's amazing, I've just read it again this week, let's do it,'" says Reynolds.

The result is the forthcoming *The Medusa Chronicles*, a book rooted in great part in shared experience. "[Steve] grew up reading the same stuff I did and he also collaborated with Clarke," says Reynolds. "It seemed the right and proper thing to do, Steve's a natural collaborator."

The duo first began sketching out the novel in earnest over "two cups of coffee and a big pad of lined paper" at Loncon 3. Things went so well that, within an hour or so, they were working on an outline of the novel.

For those unfamiliar with Clarke's original story, it centres on Howard Falcon, part man and part machine following a nasty accident. It concludes with what Reynolds describes as a "slingshot ending that catapults you into the possibilities of a much bigger story that's left unstated".





Alastair Reynolds (above) and Stephen Baxter.

Although both wanted to write this larger story ("I've been thinking about it for literally years and years, the further adventures of Howard Falcon"), there were some challenges with Clarke's source material. "There are issues with *A Meeting With Medusa*," says Reynolds, "things that make it feel very dated – technical details, there are no women... as was the way of a lot of science fiction of the period."

The answer to this was to set *The Medusa Chronicles* in an alternate timeline "where certain things have advanced more rapidly, and space exploration, rocketry are on the track it looked like we'd be on in 1970".

Beyond noting that the book explores "tension between human and machine civilisations, with Falcon as an intermediary", let's not say too much more for now for risk of spoilers. In the meantime, things clearly went well, so how about another joint book? It may just happen... "Although there's nothing on the cards, we are open to the idea of doing another collaboration in the future," says Reynolds.

The Medusa Chronicles is published in May by Gollancz.

AERIAL ASSAULT

SCI-FI TV ROUND UP

→ Sky Arts announces **Likely Stories** – a series adapting four Neil Gaiman short stories.
→ Dan Stevens, Jean Smart and Aubrey Plaza (yay!) cast in Marvel's **Legion**.
→ Fox orders a pilot for a TV show based on **The Exorcist**. WHY?
→ Virtual reality series **Halcyon** commissioned for Syfy and the Oculus Rift.
→ **Penny Dreadful** season three to film in Almeria, Spain.



→ Mike "Luke Cage" Colter reveals that an actor has already been cast for the role of Netflix's **Iron Fist**.
→ ***Doctor Who*'s Steven Moffat** receives his OBE.
→ Syfy orders a series of **Incorporated** – a new sci-fi drama produced by Matt Damon and Ben Affleck.
→ **Outlander** season two to debut on 10 April in the UK.
→ Delroy Lindo cast as Dominic Fortune in **Marvel's Most Wanted**, the forthcoming ***Agents Of SHIELD*** spin-off.

DON'T QUOTE ME

"IT WAS HARD FOR ME TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO DRIVE THE SHOW WITHOUT BEING THE GUY WHO'S DRIVING THE SHOW. I'M NOT SURE IF I SUCCEEDED."

David Duchovny sounds a little unsure of *X-Files* season 10.



© REX (1)

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SCI-FACT! **The Oculus Rift began life as a Kickstarter project from the then 18-year-old Palmer Luckey.**



Developer Andrew Willans believes storytelling "will become truly interactive".

DEVELOPER EXCLUSIVE

FATAL ATTRACTION

EVE Valkyrie and the Oculus Rift headset are reinventing the space combat game...

The Oculus Rift is almost here. The much-hyped virtual reality headset has been in development for five years but will finally be available to take home at the end of the month. And the game bundled with the (surprisingly comfy) headset is *EVE Valkyrie*.

Partly inspired by the starship battles in the rebooted *Battlestar Galactica*, *Valkyrie* sees you play an elite pilot taking part in multiplayer dogfights, right in the heart of the action.

"VR opens the doors to a level of immersion and interaction not possible on a 2D screen," says Andrew Willans, lead game designer. "It allows you to explore your surroundings in the most natural way possible: by moving your head." Indeed, as you pilot your ship, you instinctively turn, duck and rock back in your seat to evade enemy gunfire.

Valkyrie is set in the same universe as RPG *EVE Online*, but this is the first time you get to see the action up-close, through the eyes of a pilot. "Our ships and technology are rooted in *EVE Online*," says Willans. "But it's a very different game."

The *Battlestar* connection continues with Katee "Starbuck" Sackhoff lending her voice to Rán, the character who guides you through missions and explains objectives. "The story is about Rán's eternal battle with her nemesis, Fatal," explains Willans. "Fatal believes they're two sides of the same coin, but Rán has different ideas about their relationship.

"People have always dreamed of having their own Holodeck," Willans says of the new technology. "That's a long way off, but it's looking a damn sight more achievable now than when I first watched *Star Trek*."

EVE: Valkyrie will be released alongside the Oculus Rift on 27 March.

STAR WATCH

A NEWS HOPE



She'll be back.

With *The Force Awakens* having grabbed north of $2 billion at the worldwide box office, it's hardly surprising that Disney CEO Bob Iger has confirmed there'll be even more *Star Wars* movies after 2019, to follow up the already-announced standalone *Rogue One* and Han Solo films, and of course, *Episodes VIII* and *IX*.

"There are five *Star Wars* films – four more [after] *The Force Awakens* – that are in varying stages of development and production," Iger told the BBC's *Newsbeat*. "There will be more after that, I don't know how many, I don't know how often."

Alas, it looks like we'll be waiting longer than originally expected to find out whether Luke Skywalker actually has anything to say to Rey on his remote island retreat – *Episode VIII* has been moved back from its original May slot to a 15 December 2017 berth, turning *Star Wars* into an annual Christmas treat. If it worked for *The Lord Of The Rings*...

But despite that delay, the movie has started shooting with Rian Johnson at the helm, while Disney has confirmed the return of most of the original cast. There's no mention of Harrison Ford and – more surprisingly – Peter Mayhew, but it does look like Kylo Ren, Captain Phasma and General Hux made it off Starkiller Base in one piece, as all three actors are back. There are also three fresh faces confirmed for the movie: Benicio del Toro, newcomer Kelly Marie Tran and *Jurassic Park*'s Laura Dern.

Luckily we don't need to wait until *Episode VIII* to learn more about Empire tribute act the First Order. Claudia Gray's new novel *Bloodline* (due May) is set a few years before *The Force Awakens*, and features Leia the senator realising the New Republic hasn't learned any lessons from the Rebellion and the Empire. Ain't that always the way...

WHEN YOU'RE MARRIED TO A TIME LORD (or possibly not), YOU HAVE TO KEEP TRACK OF EVERYTHING.



ESPECIALLY AS IT MAY NOT ACTUALLY HAVE HAPPENED TO BOTH OF YOU YET.

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BBC BOOKS

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SCI-FACT! The second and third *Beasts* flicks are pencilled in for 16 November 2018 and 20 November 2020.

FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

Potter? More! JK Rowling returns with a new tale...

WELCOME BACK TO THE WIZARDING WORLD

Warner Bros conjured eight movies out of seven *Harry Potter* novels, creating the second highest grossing movie franchise in history. But the studio is clearly hungry for more, hence this *Potter* prequel set decades before Harry's parents were even born...

ROWLING'S RETURN

A new story? Sounds risky... However the fact that JK Rowling herself has written the script suggests that we're in safe hands, as does the fact that it involves several *Potter* veterans. David Heyman produces, Steve Kloves co-writes, and David Yates, who helmed Harry's final four flicks, directs. They all know their Muggles from their Mandrakes.

BY THE BOOK

While *Fantastic Beasts* doesn't have a novel behind it, it *is* based on a book. In 2001, Rowling published a pair of wizarding texts: *Quidditch Through The Ages* and *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them*. In terms of content, the film is very different, borrowing only the title, although David Heyman has revealed that at one point they considered making the film as a fake documentary.

UNLEASHING THE BEASTS

We've only seen the briefest of glimpses of the film so far, but what we know is this: Newt Scamander – author of many of Harry's textbooks – is visiting New York in the '20s. He brings with him a briefcase that's dimensionally transcendental, as the Doctor might say, and accidentally unleashes a horde of magical critters on the unsuspecting city.

THE MONSTER SQUAD

GQ's Best Dressed Man 2016, Eddie Redmayne, will be taking the lead as Newt, in the States for an important magical congress when the supernatural SNAFU occurs. He'll have some heavyweight talent backing him up in the form of *Inherent Vice*'s Katherine Waterston, Samantha Morton, Ron Perlman and Colin Farrell.

IT MEANS "BUMBLEBEE"

While this is a new story there may be ties to the original. Although most of the original characters aren't alive yet, Albus Dumbledore is. The wizard would have been been in his mid-forties at that point. Sir Michael Gambon is three decades older than that, but has stated that he'd be keen to return to the series, perhaps as Dumbledore's father, Percival.

BORN TO BE BAD

No word, as yet, on if we will see anything of prime *Potter* antagonist, Tom Riddle – aka Lord Voldemort. Certainly, if he does appear it could only be the most fleeting of cameos – the film takes place in 1926 and Riddle is said to have been born on New Year's Eve that year. Perhaps we'll see more of him in the two planned sequels...

WHEN TO EXPECT IT?

You can find the fantastic beasts on 18 November, *The Hunger Games*' traditional slot.



REX (1)

DON'T QUOTE ME

"THEY SEW HIS MOUTH SHUT, LET LASERS COME OUT OF HIS EYES... I REMEMBER SAYING, 'THAT'S NOT DEADPOOL.'"

Ryan Reynolds isn't much keen on *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*'s handling of Deadpool, either.



NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED FACTS

→ The script book of new *Harry Potter* play **The Cursed Child** will be published on 31 July and is already topping pre-order charts.



→ **Deadpool** made a whopping $135 million in its opening weekend – breaking records for an "R" movie.

→ DC Comics tease new "**Rebirth**" project – thought to be a line-wide relaunch.

→ **Mad Max: Fury Road** drives home with four Baftas.

→ **The Force Awakens** also did well, picking up the best Special Effects award and Rising Star for John Boyega.

→ Plans for a **Terry Pratchett** statue in Salisbury have won the support of the city council.

→ Beastie Boys producer Rick Rubin to release **Star Wars Headspace** – an album of *Wars*-themed electronica featuring a track by JJ Abrams.

→ **Stargate Atlantis** to return as a comic.

→ Paramount removes the **Terminator Genisys** sequel from its calendar.

SCI-FACT! ***Zootropolis*** **isn't the film's original title. In the States it's being released as the punchier *Zootopia*.**

NEW AUTHOR

ANDREW BANNISTER

THE ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTIST TURNED AUTHOR TELLS ALL ABOUT HIS DEBUT, *CREATION MACHINE*

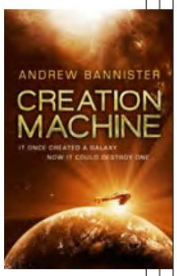


When did you first discover SF?
→ Almost as soon as I could read. I found the SF shelf in my library and read it from end to end, starting with Heinlein, Asimov and Clarke.

Tell us a little bit about The Spin, the world you've created.
→ It's several fractious groups in a state of decline, from the technically advanced Hegemony in the Outer Spin, to the near-medieval Fortunate Protectorate in the isolated centre of The Spin.

This is the first of a trilogy, but each novel stands alone, right?
→ Yes. The three books are set thousands of years apart, and there are no mortal characters carried over. Of course, you could define intelligent artefacts as characters, but that would be telling...

Did your environmental work influence the book?
→ I use a bit of environmental science. Mainly in a negative way; at least one planet has its ecosystem vandalised, and there's plenty of theft of habitats. I'm not too optimistic about that sort of thing; I suspect people are inclined to trash their surroundings for short-term gain.



How far along are you with book two?
→ It's called *Iron Gods*, it's almost there. It's been a big challenge to go back to The Spin after so many thousands of years have passed, to find traces of the first book still lying there.

Creation Machine is published on 19 May by Bantam Press.

© FELIX BANNISTER


Not exactly Dixon of Dock Green here...

DIRECTOR CHAT!

FAST & THE FURRIEST

New Disney anthropomorphic animal animation *Zootropolis* is ready to roll

Directors Byron Howard and Rich Moore are responsible for such animated favourites as *Lilo & Stitch*, *Bolt* and *Tangled*. But even their combined talents were put to the test by Disney's latest animated epic, about an entire city of animals – the titular world of *Zootropolis*.

"As a director," Howard tells Red Alert when we visit Disney's studios, "you always want to bring what you love to the movies. So you'll see what Rich and I love in this movie. You'll see noir stuff, you'll see quirky, funny humour and irreverent stuff. We want to enjoy these movies as much as we want the audience to."

Zootropolis' fusion of comedy and crime thriller begins with the arrival of bunny rabbit Judy Hopps in the big city. A rookie cop looking to rise above her status as meter maid, Hopps (voiced by *Once Upon A Time*'s Ginnifer Goodwin) partners with con-artist fox Nick Wilde (Jason Bateman) to find a missing otter, but stumbles upon a much larger mystery that endangers her new home.

"Not since *Basil The Great Mouse Detective* have we done a movie that's a mystery or a procedural kind of detective story," says Moore. "It's not a simple type of genre to pull off in animation. Because there's a lot of discussing of clues and putting together the plot. Our challenge was always, 'Okay, how can we tell this as visually as we can each step of the way without it becoming muddied to the audience?'"

The filmmaker answered the question by studying as many thrillers as possible, including classics like *Chinatown*, *Three Days Of The Condor*, *48 Hours*, *Double Indemnity* and *The Third Man*.

"We watch everything," laughs Moore. "We're like sponges, and we try to be as full a sponge as we possibly can."

Zootropolis opens on 25 March.


Is this bunny going to be in favour of bringing back fox hunting...?

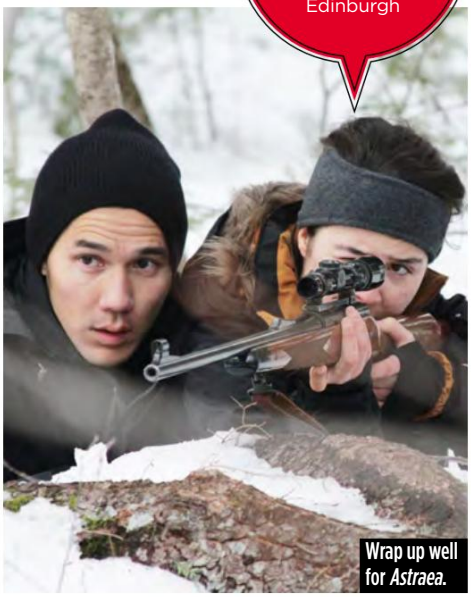
FESTIVAL OF FEAR

Love horror movies? Edinburgh's *Dead By Dawn* festival is back for its 23rd year of scaring us silly

DATE
21-24 April

LOCATION
The Filmhouse, Edinburgh

Over more than two decades, Dead By Dawn has presented a huge range of horror movies on the big screen of Edinburgh's Filmhouse cinema, winning This Is Horror's UK Event Of The Year award in the process. We spoke to founder Adele Hartley to find out what's in store for 2016...



Wrap up well for *Astraea*.

How has Dead By Dawn changed over the years?

Our focus has shifted more on to new voices – we're always looking for filmmakers who bring fresh ideas to horror, whether in short or long form, live action or animation.

What inspires you to keep the festival going year after year?

Seeing a great movie and knowing you're the person who can put it in front of an audience on the big screen where it belongs.

What are some of the highlights this year?

A couple of interesting themes have emerged and that means we're looking at different but equally terrifying visions of the near-future, as well as spending time with some of the most dysfunctional families ever to grace a screen!

Can you tell us some of the films that will be premiering?

Larry Kent's *She Who Must Burn* feels both personal and global, a livid response to restricted rights. Patrick Stewart is menace personified in Jeremy Saulnier's *Green Room*. The hauntingly beautiful post-apocalyptic landscape looks almost tempting in *Astraea*... We'll be announcing the rest of our line-up over the next few weeks.

What is the Shit Film Amnesty mentioned on your website?

We created this as a way of allowing people to offload the dreck from their DVD shelves! Just tell us why it's the worst film ever made or how you came to own it. We throw it open to audience vote and the lucky "winner" gets to take home all the entries. We do recommend that winners walk home past a skip!



She Who Must Burn tackles religious extremism and anti-abortion violence.

Dead By Dawn runs from 21-24 April at the Filmhouse Cinema, Edinburgh. www.deadbydawn.co.uk; www.facebook.com/DeadByDawnHorrorFestival; @deadbydawnfest

DATE
29-31 July

LOCATION
Olympia, London

LONDON CALLING

Get ready for another packed ***London Film & Comic Con***, this time with added Hellboy



Your chance to meet Hellboy and King Joffrey has come at last. Yep, Ron Perlman and Jack Gleeson are just two of the guests at this year's London Film & Comic Con. You'll also find Doctors Six and Seven (Colin Baker and Sylvester McCoy), *Lost* Hobbit Dominic Monaghan and a host of others. There will be panels; a dealers area for picking up merch and rare comics; cosplay and an artists alley. Adult day tickets start at £17, with passes for the full event starting at £58. If you're made of money, you can also cough up £250 for a Gold Pass to the full event which gets you photo session priority, an exclusive goodie bag and access to an exclusive chill out room, as well as refreshments for the full weekend. It's always a busy event, so arrive early if you can.

www.londonfilmandcomiccon.com

COMING UP

DOUGLAS ADAMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

11 March

Comedy historian Jem Roberts talks about how the world has changed in the years since Douglas Adams passed, with readings of unpublished archive material.
http://bit.ly/adams21c

THE THEOLOGY AND ETHICS OF *STAR WARS*

24 March

Broadcaster Samira Ahmed chairs this intriguing panel, with priest Giles Fraser, Professor Francesca Stavrakopoulou and CEO of the British Humanist Association Andrew Copson.
http://bit.ly/SWethics

TERRY PRATCHETT A MEMORIAL

14 April

This official event pays tribute to the much-missed Sir Terry at The Barbican. Apply before 14 March for your chance to obtain tickets.
discworld.com

SCI-FI-LONDON

27 April-6 May

The London International Festival of Science Fiction and Fantastic Film returns, bringing back its popular 48-hour Film Challenge.
www.sci-fi-london.com

NOR-CON

8 October

Head on over to the Norfolk Showground to meet stars like *Harry Potter*'s Miriam Margolyes, *Doctor Who*'s Ian McNeice and *Red Dwarf*'s Norman Lovett.
www.nor-con.co.uk



They're on the lookout for new recruits.

WIN! VISIT THE SET OF SYFY'S DARK MATTER!

Have the ultimate VIP day on the Toronto set – and the chance to take an exclusive extra role!

Space opera TV series *Dark Matter* returns to Syfy this summer, so *SFX* has joined forces with the channel to offer one lucky fan the exciting opportunity to fly to Toronto in Canada, and spend a day on set with the cast and crew – a truly once-in-a-lifetime prize.

You'll be given the chance to have a tour of the *Dark Matter* studio, meet and greet cast and crew, and leave after a jam-packed day with a bag full of Syfy goodies.

But that's not all. Best of all, while on set, you may even get the opportunity to be filmed in an exclusive extra role!

The prize includes direct flights to Toronto from the UK, transfers in Toronto and two nights' accommodation for the lucky winner, as well as CAN$600 to spend. On the day of your set visit you will be picked up and taken straight to the studio ready for a full day of *Dark Matter* action.

We'd also love for you to document your visit and come back to the UK with lots of pictures – we'll share some of them with *SFX* readers in the mag, and on Twitter/Facebook.

To enter, simply answer the question below at **www.syfy.co.uk/DarkMatterSetVisit**

Which of the Six wields a Samurai sword in the show?

- **Two**
- **Four**
- **Six**

The closing date for the competition is Tuesday 29 March 2016. Good luck!

Full terms and conditions can be found at www.syfy.co.uk/DarkMatterSetVisitTermsAndConditions



You could be standing between them!

A Prodigy Pictures production ("Lost Girl", "XIII"), the series is based on the graphic novel *Dark Matter*, created by Joseph Mallozzi and Paul Mullie, published by Dark Horse Comics. Executive producers are Jay Firestone, Vanessa Piazza, Joseph Mallozzi and Paul Mullie.
Competition promoter: NBC Universal Media LLC.

Image Bank

Let us put you in the picture

SCI-FACT!

In early scripts for the original *Ghostbusters*, Ecto-1 had the ability to dematerialise.



REAL STEEL

Planning on picking up the Blu-ray of last year's *Doctor Who*? You may want to choose this limited edition steelbook version, only available from Amazon. The gorgeous design is by illustrator Alice X Zhang. Zhang, who also paints covers for Titan's 12th Doctor comic, is a favourite of Capaldi's and he specifically requested that she design the art for this set.

SCOOBY NEW

This new range of comics from DC presents radical reimaginings of Hanna-Barbera cartoon characters like Scooby-Doo, the Flintstones and Johnny Quest. We're especially taken with the new *Wacky Races* which looks as if it's sprung from the fevered imagination of *Mad Max* creator George Miller. The first wave of titles will be published in mid-May.





NICE WHEELS

We've already seen the Ghostbusters' new Ecto-1 – and now here's it's two-wheeled cousin. Ecto-2 is a heavily-modded Harley SX250 with a front-mounted Proton Pack, hand-painted No Ghosts logo on the tank and helmet, and some faintly troubling biohazard stickers. Yep, it looks like the new team will be just as wildly in breach of health and safety regulations as the old one.

SCI-FACT! **In 1986 Chris Chibnall appeared on discussion programme *Open Air* where he called *Who* "clichéd" and "routine".**



CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

WHO'S NEXT

The Doctor and Sarah Jane are back on familiar territory...

Titan Comics has been on a *Who* publishing frenzy of late, with well-received titles for Doctors Eight through Twelve. Their next miniseries, however, features perhaps the best-loved Time Lord of them all. Written by Gordon Rennie and Emma Beeby, with art by Brian Williamson, "Gaze Of The Medusa" finds Tom Baker's Fourth Doctor and Sarah Jane Smith together again.

"It's the classic Doctor, the classic companion and a horror story set in Victorian London," Rennie tells Red Alert. "It sums up everything that worked best in those years when the show was firing on all cylinders."

Beeby believes that the Fourth Doctor and Sarah Jane's relationship has much in common with the bond between Peter Capaldi's Time Lord and Clara. "Sarah is the model for the new series companion," she says. "She holds her own against the Daleks, while still having vulnerability."

Rennie reveals that the Doctor will be donning some familiar garb in the five-issue series. "We've got him wearing the Sherlock Holmes get-up from 'The Talons Of Weng-Chiang'," he says. "There's also a reference to a monster from the current era, although the Doctor hasn't met them yet. And he may even bump into the ancestor of one of everyone's favourite UNIT members..."

Doctor Who: The Fourth Doctor #1 is published by Titan Comics on 23 March.

ALL CHANGE!

TIME'S UP

Moffat is out and Chibnall is in as *Doctor Who* firms up its schedules...



On 22 January the BBC confirmed that the only new *Doctor Who* to air in 2016 will be a new Christmas special. However, the broadcaster also revealed that two further series are in production. Steven Moffat will executive produce 2017's series ten after which he will step down, with *Broadchurch* creator Chris Chibnall taking over the TARDIS for 2018's series 11. This will undoubtedly mark a big shift for the show, with more developments undoubtedly to come. In the meantime, here are the five episodes that have defined Steven Moffat's era (so far)...



"THE ELEVENTH HOUR"

The finest Doctor debut episode? Quite possibly. Matt Smith is immediately charming, and Moffat puts his twisty plotting to good use by forming a life-long bond between Amy Pond and her raggedy Doctor.

"VINCENT AND THE DOCTOR"

Richard Curtis erased all memories of filmic crimes like *The Boat That Rocked* with an episode that packed an emotional wallop. Forget the space chicken – this is all about Tony Curran's portrayal of the tormented Van Gogh and that cathartic ending...





"THE DOCTOR'S WIFE"

Neil Gaiman explores the relationship between the Doctor and the TARDIS by incarnating the time machine in the body of a human woman. Funny and weird, it's a stand out from series six.



"THE DAY OF THE DOCTOR"

No Eccleston? A Doctor we've never met? The 50th anniversary special might have been a disaster. Instead it was a rollicking adventure that put a cap on the show's first five decades.

"HEAVEN SENT"

Last year's penultimate episode was a brilliant showcase for Capaldi, who spends the episode alone, trapped in a mysterious castle.

Doctor Who returns to BBC One at Christmas.





Nick Setchfield's

DEVELOPMENT HELL

Your monthly glimpse into Hollywood's hoped-for future



LIFE'S A WITCH!

POWER RANGERS

Summon the monsters! Unleash the cone bra! Threaten the trembling inhabitants of planet Earth! The *Power Rangers* reboot has found its villain in the form of ***Elizabeth Banks***, best known as dystopian fashionista Effie Trinket in the *Hunger Games* saga. She'll play eternal nemesis Rita Repulsa – surely the greatest punk rock name that never was – the alien witch who bedevilled the Rangers in the original TV episodes. First seen in the unforgettably titled adventure "Day Of The Dumpster", Rita has a lair on the Moon and wields the sorcerous power to make objects and creatures grow to phenomenal size. She later turned to good and rebranded herself as Mystic Mother, but that wasn't half as much fun. With a screenplay by *X-Men: First Class* scribes ***Ashley Miller*** and ***Zack Stentz***, *Power Rangers* opens on 24 March 2017. Banks is also onboard to direct the *Charlie's Angels* reboot.

SHAW NO MORE!

ALIEN: COVENANT

In space no one can hear you scream... but on the internet everyone can hear you walk away from a franchise. Noomi Rapace won't be returning to the role of archaeologist Elizabeth Shaw in the next instalment of ***Ridley Scott***'s xenomorphic saga. This leaves ***Michael Fassbender*** as the only returning cast member for the *Prometheus* sequel, reportedly set a decade after the events on LV-223. The new movie will follow the colony ship Covenant to a paradise



Illustration by Paul Cemmick

planet that turns out to be a dark, desolate nightmare, doubtlessly crawling with face-hugging nasties and acid-dripping phallo-beasts. Potentially joining female lead ***Katherine Waterston*** is ***Danny McBride***, best known for comedy roles in *Rock The Kasbah* and *Eastbound And Down*. *Alien: Covenant* is coming for you 6 October 2017.

LET CYLONS BE CYLONS!

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

As the ancient prophecy foretold, all of this has happened before and will happen again... Yes, just as the original *Star Wars* was swiftly followed by small-screen clone *Battlestar Galactica* so the success of *The Force Awakens* has spurred Universal Studios to dust down their own dormant '70s space opera property. Producer ***Michael De Luca*** is teaming with ***Scott Stuber*** and ***Dylan Clark*** of Bluegrass Films to reshape the star-spanning saga as a tentpole movie. It's rumoured the cinematic version will hew closer to the vibe and iconography of the disco era original rather than the post-9/11, politically charged metaphors of the noughties reboot. De Luca produced *The Social Network* and *Moneyball* and is also one of the people behind the *Fifty Shades Of Grey* franchise. We're already imagining the Cylon bondage opportunities. "By your command..."

TO HEEL AND BACK!

JURASSIC WORLD 2

It's all about ***Bryce Dallas Howard***'s heels. To some a ludicrous example of gender-compartmentalising impracticality. To others a subtly wrought metaphor for psychological growth. To the rest, shoes. "Claire is a different person now," Howard tells *E! News*, bringing some crucial insider insight into the hot button footwear issues swirling around the *Jurassic World* sequel. "The person she is at the end of the movie is not the person she was in the beginning. Her armour of sorts was that white, pristine outfit with heels in a very corporate environment. The chick at the end is totally different. So, there better not be heels!" ***Colin Trevorrow*** will write but not direct the next portion of dino action – he's keeping busy prepping *Star Wars Episode IX: Mummy's Very Cross, Kylo Ren!* – and so Universal are casting around for a new helmer, with *The Orphanage*'s ***Juan Antonio Bayona*** rumoured to be frontrunner for the gig.

ALSO BURNING

→ **Lupita Nyong'o** orbiting alien contact thriller ***Intelligent Life***... **Jonás Cuarón** helming ***Z***, a Zorro reboot... ***Blade Runner 2*** filming in July... **McG** in talks to direct ***Masters Of The Universe***... **Leonardo DiCaprio** producing YA adaptation ***The Sandcastle Empire***... **Josh Boone** directing Stephen King adaptation ***Revival***... **Jesse Wigutow** writing graphic novel adap ***Descender***... **Michael Pitt** playing the villain in ***Ghost In The Shell***... ***Sonic The Hedgehog*** movie coming in 2018... **Seth Rogen** starring in SF comedy ***The Something***... ***Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation***'s **Rebecca Ferguson** joining International Space Station tale ***Life***... **Kevin Kolsch** and **Dennis Widmyer** directing the sequel to ***Mama***... ***What We Do In The Shadows*** sequel titled ***We're Wolves***... ***Daredevil***'s **Charlie Cox** joining vampire movie ***Eat Local***, directed by **Jason Flemyng**... **TJ Fixman** writing the ***Popeye*** movie... **Tom Cruise**'s ***The Mummy*** pushed back to 9 June 2017... ***The Flash***'s **Robbie Amell** joining post-apocalyptic tale ***Arq***...

> "No one is remaking *Labyrinth*. That movie is perfect as it is..."

LUDO, CALL THE ROCKS!

LABYRINTH

Don't file this one under Potential Acts Of Cinematic Blasphemy just yet. While early reports indicated Sony Pictures were looking to remake 1986's goblin-infested Henson-Bowie-Lucas jam, screenwriter ***Nicole Perlman*** insists this isn't quite the creatively bankrupt notion it appeared to be. "Not 'rebooting' anything, guys," the *Guardians Of The Galaxy* scribe told the pitchfork-wielding Twitter multitudes. "No one is remaking *Labyrinth*. That movie is perfect as it is... *Labyrinth* is my favourite film from childhood, so I share your concerns that any continuation be handled with love and respect." Perlman tells *The Guardian* that the project has been brewing since late 2014 – the fact it leaked in the wake of Bowie's passing was, she says, "awful; it felt like a punch in the gut... It would have been a dream come true, to write something for him." So that's Lady Gaga as the Goblin Queen, then...

NOW YOU SEE HIM...

THE INVISIBLE MAN

And so we lift the sinister hat, remove the equally menacing sunglasses and unwrap the positively evil yards of tightly-wrapped surgical dressing to reveal... wait, there's nothing there! The cackling fiend has no face! What ungodly perversion of science is this? No, hold on... Let's squint a bit. Hmm. You know, in the right light, it looks an awful lot like ***Johnny Depp***, doesn't it? Hello, Johnny. Loved you in *Ed Wood*. Yes, the *Pirates Of The Caribbean* star is aboard a brand new franchise, part of the extended Monsterverse currently being cooked up in a bubbling vat at Universal Studios. He'll play the scientist meddling with the visible light spectrum in an update of HG Wells's classic tale, first brought to the screen by James Whale in 1933. The screenplay's by *Men In Black*'s ***Ed Solomon***. Depp's deal reinforces the A-list power of the Monsterverse: ***Tom Cruise*** is already signed for *The Mummy* while ***Angelina Jolie*** is being wooed for *The Bride Of Frankenstein*.

SMILE! IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD!

THOR: RAGNAROK

Taika Waititi is ready to wrestle with the great serpent Jörmungandr. "I started reading about the actual Norse Ragnarok and that's even more insane than the comics. Crazy!" the helmer tells *SuperheroHype*. When not pondering the end of reality he's plotting a helmet-to-hammer shake up of the thunder god franchise. "That's what I'm really going to concentrate on, really make an effort to change the entire thing. For me, I want to treat this as if it was the first *Thor* film, so we're going to redo it. You just have to flip it and freshen it up, like anything." And humour's going to be key to that, it seems – no surprise given his background in comedies like *What We Do In The Shadows*. "My strength in this is bringing my style of humour, which is probably a very different style of humour," the New Zealander tells *Crave Online*. "They've had good jokes in them before but I think where I come from is maybe a fresher style. It could just shake the entire thing up a bit."

REX (1)

THE AMERICAN HORROR PROJECT



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First Contact



THIS MONTH'S COMMUNICATIONS MONITOR

RUSSELL LEWIN, PRODUCTION EDITOR



What could we do for a Hot Topic this issue, we pondered. YA movies, your favourite TV channels, sci-fi in awards season, sci-fi in a 100 years' time...? And then – WHOOSH! – in came the news that Steven Moffat will be stepping down as showrunner on *Doctor Who,* with Chris Chibnall taking the helm in 2018 (see p25). You were faster out of the traps than a greyhound on a diet. We could have filled the whole mag with your opinions on this one. So read on, and keep sending us missives on all manner of subjects to the quad of contact points opposite.

SFX Hot Topic

Your views on the month's big issue

#STEVEN MOFFAT LEAVING DOCTOR WHO

Robert Allen, email I'm going to miss Moffat. He's not perfect and I haven't agreed with everything he's done while in charge. However, he's been responsible for so many wonderful moments. The last series was one of the best since the show came back. So while you'll be inundated by the "Moffat's destroyed the show" brigade looking to condemn the man, I would thank him for all he's accomplished.

MediumAtomicWeight, GamesRadar+ It is most definitely time for the Moffster to move on. He can't help but tie *Doctor Who* up in convoluted, impenetrable knots of ever increasing density such that I spend most episodes never really knowing what the hell is going on. I'm quietly confident that Chibbers will steer the TARDIS back to a period of simpler, stronger, more solid storytelling that would really benefit an actor of Capaldi's calibre.

David Weaver, Facebook It was frustrating how the BBC loudly announced the change of showrunner, then quietly mentioned there is no *Doctor Who* on TV for all of 2016, apart from the Christmas episode. Chris Chibnall might want to get Jack Harkness back, with his history with *Torchwood*, which wouldn't be bad.

Derek Penn, Facebook Good. Not a season too soon. Moffat had issues with the Doctor from day one and concentrated on his assistant way too much. The series lost direction and needs a firm hand to get it back to being the top sci-fi series on television.

Steve Matthewman, Facebook Let us not forget he gave us the Silence, the War Doctor and Tom Baker! I think he has been an excellent showrunner and written some incredible episodes. I for one will miss him.

Sali Earls, Facebook While Peter Capaldi is consistently excellent, the most recent series was extremely weak. I'm a lifelong fan, but I very nearly gave up on it.

Nigel Ellis, Facebook I think the show needed a break. It's perfectly true that Moffat wrote some truly excellent episodes including the hugely enjoyable 50 years show. However I do feel that over the past three years or so the series' writing has been poor/inconsistent.



Moffat: definitely keen on Daleks.

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> It needs a firm hand to get it back to being TV's top sci-fi series

The rambling introduction of Clara, for me, bungled any chance of relating to a companion whose origins I just did not completely understand and frankly ended up not caring about. I will never not watch an episode of *Doctor Who* but the last few seasons have made it almost a chore.

Andy P Meakin, Facebook How many episodes does everyone think it will be before everyone starts hating on Chibnall? I give it two before those who say Moffat sucked start begging for him to return. Such is the casual whimsy of "fandom" these days.

SFX *Just a few of the hundreds of responses we got on this topic. Thanks one and all! My tuppenceworth? Moffat started brilliantly but I haven't loved the last couple of years – too glum and pompous, and the show not being overly bothered about the casual viewer or children is wrong, methinks. But I reckon he'll put his all into the last series and it could be a goodie. Then I'll welcome Mr Chibnall as a breath of fresh air.*

Look out for the next SFX Hot Topic at bit.ly/SFXHotTopic


His finest hour (and a bit)?


Some of the greatest ever monsters?


One of six Doctors under Moffat. (Really. Count up.)


The Good Dinosaur: *The Revenant* for young 'uns?

#MORE WHO!

Emma Watts, email I read Timothy Williams's email (issue 270) with an eye-rolling sense of ennui and was once again reminded of why I no longer bother with *Doctor Who*. Not because of the TV show but because of the crazed fandom that has sprung up around it, comparable to fascism, whereby any detraction from the party line is immediately denounced as "spiteful sneering, old regurgitated complaints, attempts to belittle" and so on. Where has it come from? This complete inability to accept that (a) other people are entitled to their opinions; and (b) their opinions may not be the same as yours? Where is our tolerance for an even-handed debate that doesn't degenerate into derogatory insults?

Timothy makes the assumption that all critics of *Doctor Who* are just writing out of spite or just want to moan, rather than considering that some of them may have valid points. Some of them may even enjoy the programme in spite of their criticisms – it is possible to enjoy something while also acknowledging its faults. And in a terrific double standard, Timothy bemoans "the nastier, more insecure face of fandom" then later calls the editor an idiot because he chose to print letters which don't match Timothy's own views about the show. He also uses the word "frankly" far too much, which means that his letter, frankly, comes over more like a rant rather than a considered opinion.

I'm not going to get into whether *Doctor Who* is good or bad because I simply don't care anymore. Not about it or the constant vicious debate that surrounds it. That nastier, more insecure face of fandom has ruined it for me.

SFX *You make some good points, Emma, there do seem to be some people who get somewhat uppity about issues around the show. Don't go though, we need you around to speak sense!*

THE GOOD GOOD DINOSAUR

Mike Garner, email *The Good Dinosaur* is proof Pixar need to release more than one film a year. It's the complete opposite of *Inside Out*. Goddam, how violent is that film! You put on your review that it might be too scary for younger viewers. I both agree and disagree, kids love to be scared. It's an ideal film. The part with Spot and the giant insect is both gross and laugh out loud in equal measures. →

First Contact



SFX *I agree with your disagreement, Mike, it's perfect for the young audience who will be its main audience. I really liked its simplicity, its lessons about the importance of family and that it's free of the brashness and freneticness of many modern animations. Looked stunning too.*

REAPPRAISING THE CLASSICS

AJ Higgins, email I was disappointed to see that you have given minimal coverage of the recent news that the classic science fiction series *Starhunter* would not only be getting a third series, but also a videogame, a comic series and a HD remaster for the original two series. Let's not forget that while the first series has been criticised for its effects and acting, it made up for that with its plot-driven storyline and characterisation. I think this series deserves more credit than it's given; it has been described as the most realistic portrayal of a solar-bound future by several sources, it is quite blatantly a predecessor to Joss Whedon's *Firefly*, and just the concept alone is the coolest thing ever: *Star Wars* bounty hunters in a *Blade Runner*-themed SF universe.


Yep, it's *Starhunter*. We think.

SFX *Unfortunately, AJ, I've just done a poll of the office and responses ranged from "Err..." to "Did it even air over here?" Sorry! We'll keep our eyes on this one and see how it develops.*

LEGENDS OF... WHEN?

Rob Horrocks, email Yet again, UK broadcasters have made yet another stupid, idiotic decision. This time it's Sky 1 responsible for the outrage.

For some reason, *The Flash* and *Arrow* will not be resuming on Sky 1 until March, and *Legends Of Tomorrow* won't be starting until then either. Considering that before Christmas we were only a week behind the US broadcasts of the episodes, this decision means that we'll be several weeks behind, which creates the issue of having to avoid spoilers across the net.

Do they not realise that decisions like this are precisely the reason that many resort to downloading these shows online? Not that I'll be taking that route due to wanting to watch these shows without lag and with better quality visuals and audio, but that doesn't make it any less annoying that we're made to wait longer for some stupid unknown reason.

SFX *I guess there are a large number of programmes fighting for a limited amount of slots but yes, this is the irksome sort of delay that sends folks to those naughty download websites.*

> "Yet again, broadcasters have made an idiotic decision"

#WE ALSO HEARD FROM

Craig Henderson, Facebook I think Moffat started off really well, but there's just been far too much inconsistency throughout his run for me to get too teary-eyed over his departure.

John Frahm, Facebook I don't agree with his harshest critics, I think Moffat did a lot of good for the show. I hope Capaldi stays at least into Chibnall's first series.

Lindsay Comer, Facebook Steven Moffat is a legend, a genius and *Doctor Who* will miss him. The "fans" that complain will realise just how good a writer he is when he's not writing for *Who* anymore. That being said, change is good.

Gary Pratt, Facebook I don't know what to think. The internet seems divided, did Moffat go voluntarily or was he pushed?

Keith Henney, Facebook A change of direction may be a good thing – I like Capaldi but I don't think he has been served well so far with his stories.

Seb Jowett, Facebook Moffat has great ideas, and can write cracking standalone episodes. Though when in charge it seemed that he often tried to be too clever.

James Kinsley, Facebook Don't want to be too harsh, but think SM brought far more to the show as a writer than a showrunner.

Neil Finlay, Facebook Steven Moffat wrote the best episodes of RTD's production era, and saw *Doctor Who* during his tenure get even bigger worldwide, and in its 50th anniversary year made an episode worthy of celebration. For those things we should thank him.

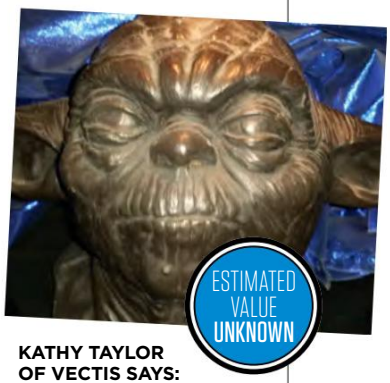
SFX *Yep, it's officially our hottest ever Hot Topic! These arguments are going to go on well past closing time...*

CA$H IN THE AT-AT

POWERED BY Vectis AUCTIONS

Your sci-fi memorabilia valued by the experts from auctioneers Vectis

→ Mike Struys sent us photos of his Yoda movie prop bust. It comes with a certificate of authenticity saying it was used as a reference for the CG effects in *Attack Of The Clones*, and that it was "rescued" from being thrown away after filming. "I was wondering if you can help me put a value on this item. It came into my possession after I was on a TV show in Canada, and won a contest."



KATHY TAYLOR OF VECTIS SAYS: This "original reference Yoda head" is possibly a unique piece and consequently very difficult to value. It's the sort of item that has no precedent at auction so I would be unable to hazard a realistic guess. Value depends upon provenance. There can sometimes be a problem when links to original origin become more and more tenuous and misty with the passage of time. And sometimes people perceive there to be a massive value when there just aren't the buyers.

If you've got a piece of memorabilia you'd like us to feature, send us a photo of your item with a few words about what it means to you, to sfx@futurenet.com, using the subject line Cash In The AT-AT.

BATMAN v SUPERMAN

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From director Zack Snyder (*Man Of Steel*) comes *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*, starring Oscar winner Ben Affleck (*Argo*) as Batman/Bruce Wayne and Henry Cavill (*Man Of Steel*, *The Man From UNCLE*) as Superman/Clark Kent in the characters' first big-screen pairing. Fearing the actions of a god-like superhero left unchecked, Gotham City's own formidable, forceful vigilante takes on Metropolis's most revered, modern-day saviour, while the world wrestles with what sort of hero it really needs. And with Batman and Superman at war with one another, a new threat quickly arises, putting mankind in greater danger than it's ever known before.



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STAR WARS: EPISODE VIII

Wishlist
WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE IN UPCOMING MOVIES AND TV

Will Luke actually get to say something next time? And will anyone else die?

Illustration by Paul Garner

YOUR TOP 5 REQUESTS

DISNEY! ALL THIS STUFF OUR READERS WANT BETTER BE IN THE NEXT MOVIE, OR WE'LL THROW A BIG KYLO REN-STYLE STROP!

MORE ORIGINALITY

1 Lots of you told us that while you enjoyed *The Force Awakens*, many of the plot points – like a droid carrying secret plans and a planet-destroying weapon – felt a bit, well, *familiar*. "Be brave," says **@ClubFDO**. JJ has secured the perimeter now. Rian Johnson should move from there to something new." "No more Death Stars!" chips in **John Gardiner**.

LOTS OF LUKE

2 Unsurprisingly, pretty much everyone wants more Luke, which won't exactly be difficult. People generally suggested that he's seen training Rey, but **Joeri Lonsu** had an interesting different angle. "Use the original actors and make them young again with CGI... show what happened to Luke five years after *Return Of The Jedi*, in a flashback."

LEIA HEROICS

3 While it makes sense that, as a General, Leia wouldn't be getting her hands dirty on the frontline, quite a few of you want to see her showing how handy she is with a blaster. "I'd like to see Carrie Fisher involved in a final battle – perhaps against Captain Phasma," said **John C Farris**. **Snoozie Hick**, meanwhile, had two words: "Jedi Leia".

ACKNOWLEDGE I-III

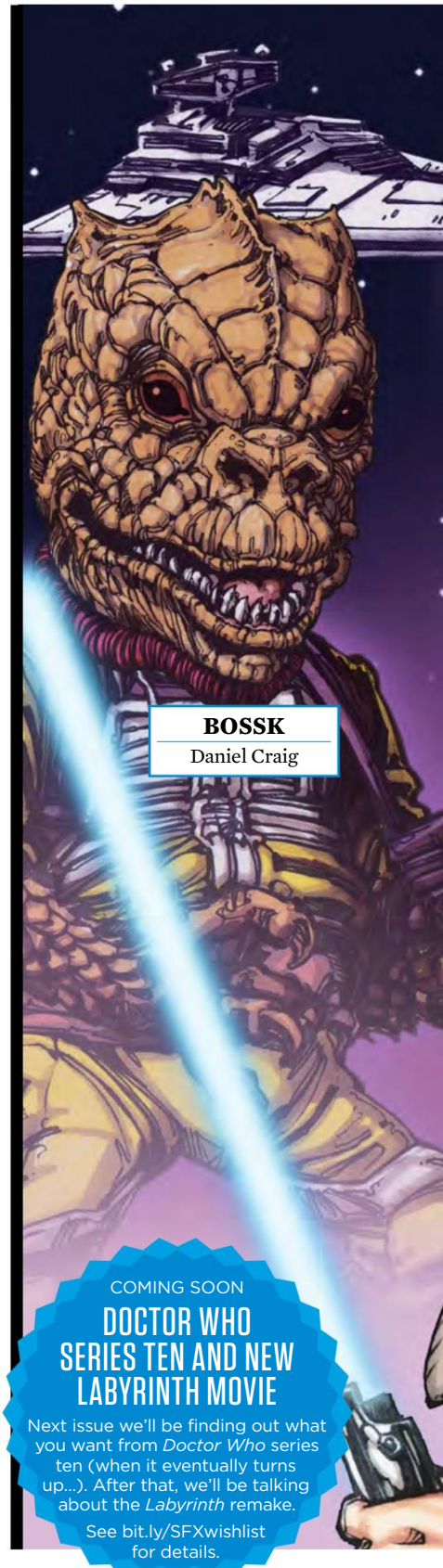
4 The fact that *The Force Awakens* was light on callbacks to the prequel movies didn't sit well with some. **Amy Dohnt** wrote, "Stone-cold badass Padmé Amidala doesn't even feature in a throwaway line? Not cool." **MR Michael**, meanwhile, requested, "Gungans, Geonosians... *anything* that respects all six films, not just the first three!"

ADVENTURE!

5 This one word cropped up a lot... **Andy Foster** was just one of those who used it. "Rian Johnson definitely shouldn't go with 'grim, gritty sci-fi' like he's previously been quoted as saying. Adventure!" **Craig Oxbrow** concurs: "Rey, Finn, Poe and BB-8 having exciting adventures in space. That's all I need."

And that's not all they want...

→ **Harold Okafor-Withers** If Captain Phasma makes a return, let's see her kicking some serious arse. If she's the leader of the First Order's Stormtrooper legions, show us why.
→ **Tomas Becks** Bring back the coolest guy in the galaxy: Lando Calrissian! But not with him being Finn's dad – that's unnecessary and way too easy.
→ **Julian Searle** I'd like to see a mean bounty hunter – not a resurrected Boba Fett, but someone a lot like him. Maybe he's been sent after Finn or something.
→ **Derek Cooke** Ren having his head ripped off his shoulders by Chewie, who holds it aloft while screaming "Haaaaaaaan!", then launches it into an abyss/volcano/Death Star portal.
→ **Kurt Griffith** Have Kylo Ren keep his mask on more. It's not that I don't like Adam Driver's face, just that his "mask voice" is brilliant and chilling.
→ **Neil Gardner** Some evolution in technology. Can't believe the designs have changed so little in 20/30 years!
→ **Owen Hines** Don't bring back Han Solo – as a ghost or otherwise! Seriously. That death has to count for something.
→ **Beth Duncan** Let's find out how Kylo Ren went bad. I can live with flashbacks if it helps the story.
→ **Dave Smith** Ewoks v Wookiees... Fur fight-fest!
→ **Rosie Banks** Surely Leia's got to come face-to-face with her son, Kylo Ren? Maybe she'll send him to his room without supper.
→ **Neon Echo** Denis Lawson. Wedge Antilles happily living with Luke Skywalker. They are Rey's parents.
→ **Lewis Carr** Bring in bounty hunters, have Ren be less conflicted, and develop Poe's character.
→ **Richard Bent** Rey trains with Luke, Ren trains with Snoke, Finn and Poe go on a badass adventure somewhere with Chewbacca and BB-8, and it all ties together at the end.
→ **FlangeBadger** *Kids Of The Force*. Set in a Jedi High School for precocious Resistance children. Possibly a musical.



BOSSK
Daniel Craig

COMING SOON
DOCTOR WHO SERIES TEN AND NEW LABYRINTH MOVIE
Next issue we'll be finding out what you want from *Doctor Who* series ten (when it eventually turns up...). After that, we'll be talking about the *Labyrinth* remake.
See bit.ly/SFXwishlist for details.

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YOUR DREAM CAST



124

THE SPARROW

by Mary Doria Russell, 1996

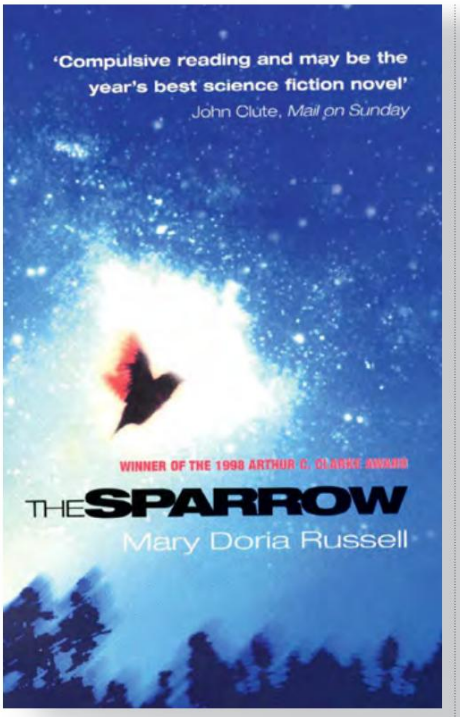
Emma Newman looks back on an Arthur C Clarke Award-winner



***The Sparrow*, written by** Mary Doria Russell, is one of those rare science fiction novels that not only transports you to an alien planet, but also into the deepest psychological recesses of its protagonist. Published in 1996, it won the Clarke Award, the James Tiptree award and the BSFA award for best novel and was also critically acclaimed outside of the SFF community.

It's not an easy read; it demands patience and close attention, but the emotional pay-off is extraordinary. The novel draws the reader into the story via two parallel threads of one man's life, a Jesuit priest called Emilio Sandoz. One thread recounts events beginning in 2019 when a radio telescope picks up signals from a planet that suggest alien intelligence, leading to an expedition to the planet of Rakhat organised and funded by Jesuits. The second thread is set decades later during an enquiry into the events that took place on Rakhat, the only witness and survivor being a broken, traumatised Sandoz who is reluctant to say anything about what transpired and why he was the only returnee.

Russell takes her time, giving the reader a beautifully written study of the young Sandoz, full of incredible energy and optimism as he meets and gets to know the people who later become fellow expedition team members, alongside an exploration of his physical and psychological suffering after the mission. The difference is stark, building an intense desire to find out what terrible thing happened to break such a remarkable man. As Russell introduces the other team members, drawing their personalities with such deft and loving strokes, the need to know why they didn't come back



with Sandoz builds into a compulsion, driving you through the last third of the book while your guts are twisted into knots. It's so easy to fall in love with these people, and every turn of the page is one step closer to discovering how the mission unravels. Thanks to the structure of the novel, instead of reading to find out if the characters you care about survive, you read to find out how it all went wrong. It's very clear that it's something truly awful and the tension is exquisitely maintained, giving an immensely cathartic emotional climax when you discover where the title of the book comes from.

Russell has an academic background in paleoanthropology with an impressive knowledge of human history, along with an interesting personal experience of faith (she was raised as a Catholic, left the church and was an atheist for 25 years and then converted to Judaism). In an interview, Russell explained how she didn't necessarily set out to write SF, but instead the story she wanted to write chose the genre. She started writing the novel during the 500th anniversary of Columbus landing in the New World and wanted to explore the "radical ignorance" experienced by explorers when meeting a new civilisation. Short of a historical novel, what better way to examine those challenges than arriving at a new planet?

Like all the best science fiction, *The Sparrow* invites us to consider an array of issues that go beyond the challenges of a first contact situation; the preservation of faith in the face of the horrific, the strengths and weaknesses of religion and the impact of societal structures including the privileged elite living off the labour of an oppressed underclass.

If you like your science fiction to have depth, complex characters and a compelling narrative that keeps you reading into the small hours, then *The Sparrow* is one of the best novels you could choose to read.

Emma Newman's Planetfall is out now.

Like this? Try these!

CHILDREN OF GOD
***by* MARY DORIA RUSSELL (1998)**
→ **The sequel to *The Sparrow*, in which Sandoz returns to Rakhat and discovers the impact of their first contact on the distant world.**

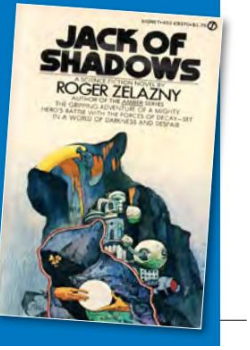


A CASE OF CONSCIENCE
***by* JAMES BLISH (1958)**
→ **Another novel focused on a small team of scientists, including a Jesuit priest, sent to another planet to investigate an alien race that lives in a utopian society without religion.**



NEXT ISSUE

Our next Book Club outing (in *SFX* 273, on sale 30 March), sees *The Girl With All The Gifts* scribe Mike Carey writing about Roger Zelazny's 1971 melding of sci-fi and fantasy, *Jack Of Shadows*. If you're new to the book – or just fancy giving it another read – now's the time to do it, before a top writer gives his opinion.



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WE MEANT TO SAY...

David Langford is tickled by typos



"THE *BALTIMORE CITY PAPER* CLEARLY HAD A STORM OF GEEK COMPLAINTS"

→ *Illustration by Andy Watt*

Reporting the lamented death of David Bowie, chameleon of pop and Man Who Fell To Earth, a flustered Heart FM Radio presenter blurted "David Cameron has died" before her hasty revision "David Bowie, I mean David Bowie." It would be very wrong to think SF fans' hearts lifted a little before they sank with the correction.

Newspaper corrections sometimes have genre relevance. *Guardian* examples include Tintagel's "tavern traditionally known as Merlin's Cave", sadly corrected to "cavern", and advice to emphasise text in email by surrounding it with Asterixes. Correction: "Asterix is a cartoon character created by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo. The device referred to is an asterisk..."

At the end of 2015, a *Pasadena Star-News* round-up collected some SF/fantasy gems: *The New York Times* on the author of *Charlotte's Web* and *Stuart Little*: "Correction: An earlier version of this article misidentified the number of years EB White wrote for *The New Yorker*. It was five decades, not centuries."

The Brighton *Argus* on futurology: "*The Argus* would like to apologise for suggesting that the director of the Brighton Science Festival believes the '21st century will be remembered for a terrible war between mankind and goats.'"

Alas, the best *Star-News* discovery came from a satire site and brought a grumpy complaint from its claimed source *The Prague Post*. "Last week's column mistakenly misidentified a source. The European Commission president is Romano Prodi, not Buffy the Vampire Slayer." Definitely too good to check.

The online *Baltimore City Paper*, reporting on a comics-themed cafe called Bamf after an *X-Men* sound effect, clearly had a storm of geek complaints... "Correction: An earlier version of this post stated that Nightcrawler says 'Bamf' when he teleports. It is the sound that happens when he teleports."

Wall Street Journal: "The Minotaur is a monster in Greek mythology that is part bull, part human. A travel article in Saturday's Off Duty section mistakenly called it a one-eyed monster." That would be a Cyclopsotaur.

Slate: "In a March 2 'Future Tense' blog post, Torie Bosch misspelled the science fiction award won by writer Bruce Sterling. It is of course the Hugo Award, not the Huge Award."

The *Independent*'s Mini-Me paper *i* is flaky at astronomy: "In yesterday's report 'Copernicus and Galileo: now stars in their own right', we said Copernicus had demonstrated that the Sun goes round the Earth. It has been pointed out to us that this is wrong and, in fact, the Earth goes round the Sun. We are sorry for the mistake." Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition!

The Sun: "In an article on Saturday headlined 'Flying saucers over British Scientology HQ', we stated 'two flat silver discs' were seen 'above the Church of Scientology HQ'. Following a letter from lawyers for the Church, we apologise to any alien lifeforms for linking them to Scientologists."

And a million netizens who shared Simon Pegg's alleged tweet – "If you're sad today, just remember the world is over 4 billion years old and you somehow managed to exist at the same time as David Bowie" – need to know it's not by Pegg and wasn't originally about Bowie. Good line, though.

David Langford regrets that in his column on Shapeshifters, this word appeared with the F missing throughout.

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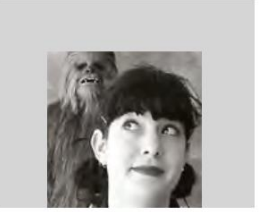




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STRANGE DAYS

Bonnie Burton loves a superhero with a difference



"IF STRANGE PLAYED BASS IN AN INDUSTRIAL BAND, I PROBABLY WOULD HAVE DATED HIM"

→ *Illustration by Maria Colino*

In an era where superheroes can be anything from eccentric billionaires to displaced gods to radioactive rejects, it feels like us geeks have seen everything already played out on a big screen or on television. We've grown accustomed to the same old superheroes fighting their usual enemies over and over again.

So when Marvel announced that not only were we getting a Doctor Strange movie but that Benedict Cumberbatch would be playing him, I was ecstatic. Here is a superhero that doesn't look or act like the typical masked man. In fact, he doesn't actually have a disguise, just a fancy sense of fashion.

To really appreciate Doctor Strange, you have to know his backstory. Originally created in 1963 by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko during the Silver Age of comics, Doctor Stephen Strange starts out as a brilliant but arrogant neurosurgeon whose career is wrecked when a tragic car accident ruins the tools of his trade – his hands. He subsequently spends all his savings travelling around the world looking for obscure cures to no avail, until he finds a recluse named the Ancient One in the Himalayas, who trains him in the hidden world of alternate dimensions and magic, and the power it wields. He then becomes the Sorcerer Supreme who protects us humans from magical threats. He draws much of his magical power from mystical entities, refers to the Book of the Vishanti for spells, and uses the Orb of Agamotto crystal ball for clairvoyance purposes.

When the character first landed in the early '60s, readers couldn't get enough of not only Doctor Strange, but the storyline's references to Egyptian myths, Sumerian gods and, even in some cases, the psychology of Carl Jung. While the strip itself pre-dated the counterculture movement, the vivid and surrealistic mystical landscapes that Doctor Strange inhabited appealed to college students first discovering LSD and psychedelic mushrooms.

But that's only one of the interesting aspects of this unusual Marvel superhero that I've adored since I discovered him in the late 1980s when writer Peter B Gillis and artists Richard Case and Randy Emberlin worked on the character. I was drawn to Doctor Strange because he was prideful, moody, dark and self-destructive. If he played bass in an industrial band, I probably would have dated him.

Doctor Strange always seems to appeal to fans like me who were looking for a more cosmic kind of character, a superhero that even surrealist artist Salvador Dali would appreciate. He wasn't like the X-Men or the Avengers. He delved into the Dark Arts to help him save us from one bizarre danger after another. He was like a sexy Severus Snape with a mission to save the universe. He even lived in a house built on a site known for pagan sacrifices.

Maybe it's my love for all things Wicca and magic, or maybe it's my inner goth swooning, but I can't help but feel giddy knowing that my favourite cosmic superhero is headed to the big screen this year with Benedict Cumberbatch playing the lead. I can only imagine how exciting it will be to see magical lightning spring from his fingertips as he puts his rival Baron Mordo in his place.

Watching Cumberbatch roam his character's occult library in search of the perfect spell book within the confines of his Sanctum Sanctorum will feel like witnessing my Sherlock/Strange fan fiction come to life, and I can't wait.

Bonnie's knitting her Doctor Strange cape right now.

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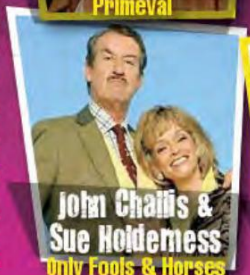

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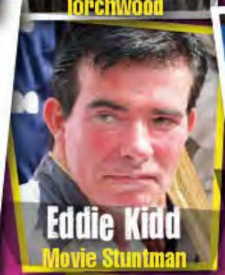

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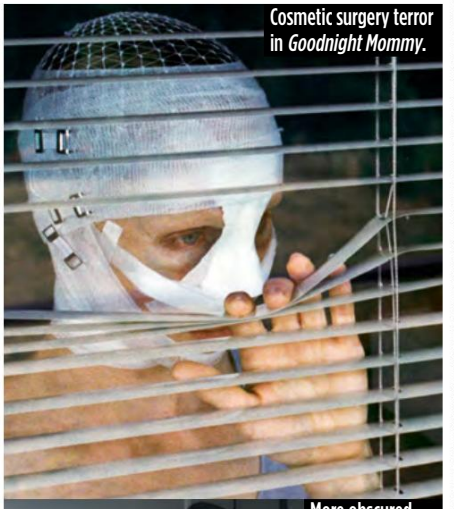
MARCH MADNESS

Seems like March is the new January (which is of course the poor man's October) when it comes to horror. The dawn of spring arrives with a whole raft of cinema releases throughout the month. ***Goodnight Mommy*** is an Austrian film where twin boys in the countryside fear their mother is an impostor, post-cosmetic surgery, but is it her or them that's the real threat? It screened to great reviews in Venice, getting comparisons to *The Orphanage* and *Funny Games*, so definitely one to watch. Then there's ***The Boy***, which sees a nanny terrorised by a couple's life-size doll that may be alive. Will it terrify? My prediction: probably not. Sci-fi horror is going big with sneaky sequel ***10 Cloverfield Lane*** landing (oh JJ, you cunning devil!), and also not so big with portal-to-the-underworld chiller ***The Other Side Of The Door***, from *F* director Johannes Roberts. And don't miss Jacobean wickedness unbound in ***The Witch***.

INDIE GOLD

Another Sundance has set, and with it a handful of weird indie horrors that everyone's going to be talking about in around a year when they finally come out. My vampire-bat ears are twitching for three. 1) Iranian chiller ***Under The Shadow***, set in Tehran in the late '80s at the height of the Iran-Iraq war, is about a reluctant stay-at-home mother caring for her daughter who becomes haunted by demons after her husband goes into military service. Feminist and frightening, it's being called "this year's *Babadook*". 2) ***Trash Fire***: This is from Richard Bates Jr, who made brilliant freak show *Excision* and inventive but not quite as good *Suburban Gothic*. *Trash Fire* is a sort of black romcom about a couple who hate each other, and a maniac granny, ending in a bloodbath. Grimy indie mumblegore. 3) ***The Greasy Strangler***: Notorious already for how utterly disgusting, relentless, puerile and ugly it is, debut director Jim Hosking's tale concerns a father and son who do disco walking tours in Los Angeles and who become love rivals over a woman on the tour. In his spare time the dad carries out killings naked and slathered in cooking fat. Sounds amazing!

Demons in Iran, twins in Austria and a murderer doused in kitchen grease...



Cosmetic surgery terror in *Goodnight Mommy*.



More obscured faces in *Trash Fire*.



Two reasons in pink to see *The Greasy Strangler*!

THAT'S NOT A KNIFE!

The latest horror TV spin-off is ***Wolf Creek***, coming to screening service Stan later this year. Director of the original Greg McLean is on board and Aussie outback nutter Mick Taylor (John Jarratt) is also lurking in the background, though it looks from the first teaser that the focus will be on new character Eve, sole survivor of one of Mick's attacks, who's out for revenge. *Wolf Creek* is one of my favourite horrors, not for "head on a stick" or the horrific crucifixion, but for the horror of manners – the girls are out of their depth, they know that Mick's a weirdo, but since he's not actually *done* anything wrong at first they don't hit him with a stick and run away. Because that would be rude. I would be the same. "You've hacked my arm off? Oh dear, sorry, it was my fault for getting in the way of your knife." It's the British way. Eve (Lucy Fry) is an American tourist, so she'll no doubt be a ripped weapons-expert who can survive days in the outback on a thimble of spit and a Hershey bar. The horror of embarrassment: now that's truly terrifying.

HERO OF HORROR

A fond goodbye to a horror stalwart, as February saw the passing of Richard Gladman, aka @cyberschizoid – publisher and editor of *Space Monsters* magazine, founder of Frighten Brighton horror festival and of the Classic Horror Campaign which petitioned to bring back horror double-bills to the BBC. I didn't know him well but the few times we met he was hilarious, gregarious, generous and just really passionate about the genre. And he got things done. He'll be missed.

Dreadful Old Movie

Philip Ridley's 1990 *The Reflecting Skin* gets a DVD release in March. It's a strange "mythical interpretation of childhood" about a boy in Idaho in the 1950s who grows to believe that the widow next door is a vampire. Harrowing, beautiful and emotional.



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FREESPEAK

WHERE WRITERS AND OPINIONS COLLIDE

Author *Marc Turner* wonders if epic fantasy is becoming too gritty



I read an article a while back about George RR Martin's fantasy epic, *Game Of Thrones*. The author was complaining about how dark the story was. "Where were all the heroes?" she asked. And couldn't the good guys – or, rather, the least bad ones – win sometimes?

The move towards fantasy with a grittier edge has to be seen in the context of what came before. The first fantasy novel I read was *Pawn Of Prophecy* by David Eddings. I loved that book, but looking back, I'd have to say it offered an idealised view of the subject matter. In many fantasy series of the '70s and '80s, the heroes wore white, the villains wore black, and the protagonist could cut his way through a legion of enemies without getting even a spot of blood on his cloak.

Fantasy epics typically deal with high stakes and momentous events. Most likely they will feature armed conflict, and if you're going to write about war, you shouldn't romanticise it. You've got to include a sprinkling of savagery and horror, because if you don't, you're not depicting it accurately. History provides plenty of examples of such brutality.

I have seen it argued, though, that fantasy writers are taking grittiness too far. Apparently some of them are engaged in a "race to the bottom", with more and more brutality being included for shock value alone. That is not a phenomenon I have witnessed myself, but I do think it is something to be wary of. If it is wrong to romanticise war, it is surely also wrong to romanticise violence. Horror should always be presented as horrible, rather than as "cool". Nor should brutality be used as a substitute for theme or character development.

If you're going to include brutality, arguably it should be to a purpose. It could be used, for example, to examine the impact of violence on its victims or its perpetrators. As in most things, a balance is called for. To my mind, epic fantasy should contain elements of both light and dark. But as to what the "right" balance of those elements is... Well, everyone will have their own opinion on the matter.

Marc Turner is the author of The Dragon Hunters, book two of The Chronicles Of The Exile series, out now from Titan Books.

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Future Publishing Ltd Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA
Email sfx@futurenet.com **Web** www.gamesradar.com/sfx

EDITORIAL
Editor Richard Edwards, richard.edwards@futurenet.com
Art Editor Jonathan Coates, jonathan.coates@futurenet.com
Deputy Art Editor Catherine Kirkpatrick, catherine.kirkpatrick@futurenet.com
Production Editor Russell Lewin, russell.lewin@futurenet.com
Features Editor Nick Setchfield, nick.setchfield@futurenet.com
Reviews Editor Ian Berriman, ian.berriman@futurenet.com
Acting News Editor Will Salmon, william.salmon@futurenet.com
US Editor (East Coast) Tara Bennett, usaeast@sfx.co.uk
US Editor (West Coast) Joseph McCabe, usawest@sfx.co.uk

CONTRIBUTORS
Sam Ashurst, Paul Bradshaw, Saxon Bullock, Bonnie Burton, Bryan Cairns, Paul Cemmick, Nick Chen, Nic Clarke, Maria Colino, Sarah Dobbs, Rhian Drinkwater, Paul Garner, Dave Golder, Jamie Graham, Steve Jarratt, Stephen Jewell, Andrew Kelly, David Langford, James Mottram, Jayne Nelson, Emma Newman, Andrew Osmond, Eddie Robson, Chris Schilling, Tom Senior, Neil Smith, Andy Watt, David West, James White, Jonathan Wright

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ADVERTISING
Commercial Sales Director Clare Dove, clare.dove@futurenet.com
Advertising Director Andrew Church, andrew.church@futurenet.com
Advertising Manager Michael Pyatt, michael.pyatt@futurenet.com
Account Director Adrian Hill, 01225 442244, adrian.hill@futurenet.com
For advertising queries, please contact Adrian Hill, 01225 442244

MARKETING
Head Of Brand Marketing and Newstrade Laura Driffield, laura.driffield@futurenet.com
Marketing Manager Kristianne Stanton, kristianne.stanton@futurenet.com
Marketing Executive Emma Clapp, emma.clapp@futurenet.com

PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION
Production Controller Frances Twentyman, frances.twentyman@futurenet.com
Production Manager Mark Constance, mark.constance@futurenet.com
Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons on behalf of Future
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2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT **Tel** 020 7429 4000
Overseas distribution by Seymour International

CIRCULATION
Trade Marketing Manager Michelle Brock, 020 7429 3683,
michelle.brock@seymour.co.uk

LICENSING
International Director Matt Ellis, matt.ellis@futurenet.com
Tel +44 (0)1225 442244

THE SENIOR PARTNERS
Group Art Director Graham Dalzell
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"It's the bloody *Nightmare Before Christmas*"

Worlds Of SFX

There's a whole universe to explore beyond this magazine

THIS MONTH ON gamesradar+



Five things to look out for on our massive entertainment portal at gamesradar.com/sfx

1. The Netflix-Marvel universe is starting to rival the MCU with great shows like *Daredevil* and *Jessica Jones*, but with so many interlocking series it's difficult keeping track of everyone. Check out our ultimate character guide. **http://bit.ly/SFXnetflix**

2. With Disney basically planning a *Star Wars* movie a year until the end of time, you might think all your Christmases have come at once, but here's why the solo Han Solo movie is a bad idea. **http://bit.ly/SFXHan**

3. Have you noticed that Sean Bean dies... *a lot*? Yeah, us too. We're celebrating the mortally challenged actor with his top 15 deaths, from *Game Of Thrones* to *Lord Of The Rings* and more. **http://bit.ly/SFXSean**

4. If you think everyone's upset about Steven Moffat leaving *Doctor Who*, hear from one fan who thinks Chris Chibnall will be the best thing to happen to the Doctor since... well, Steven Moffat. **http://bit.ly/SFXChibnall**

5. Season six of *Game Of Thrones* is coming soon, so we're speculating about what could happen now the show has overtaken the books. Here are our top 10 fan theories. **http://bit.ly/SFXThrones**



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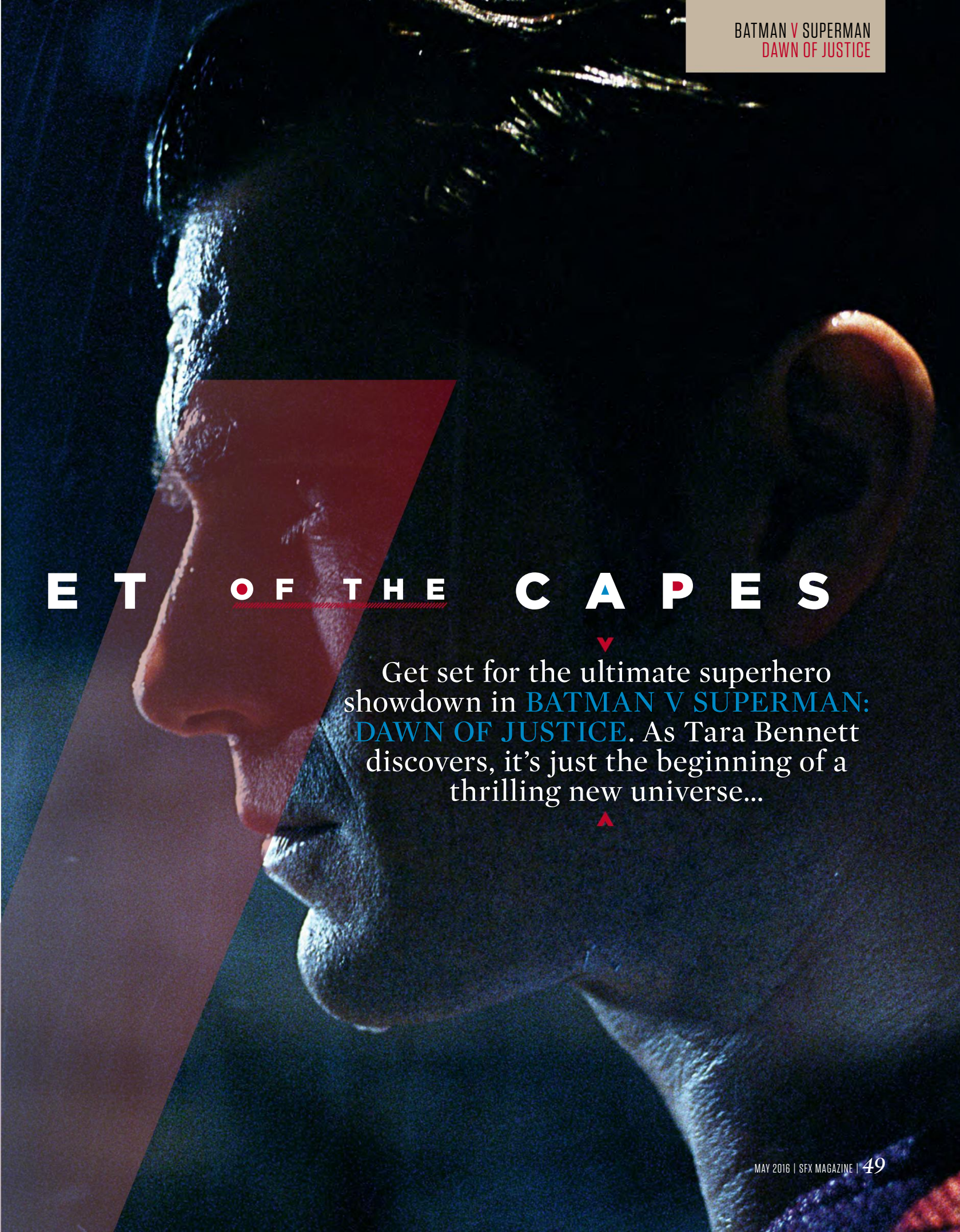


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THE AMAZING SUPERHERO ISSUE



RISE OF THE PLAN



ET OF THE CAPES

Get set for the ultimate superhero showdown in BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE. As Tara Bennett discovers, it's just the beginning of a thrilling new universe...



There's been a war brewing in cinemas ever since Tony Stark jolted the pleasure receptors of summer movie crowds in 2008. After *Iron Man* threw down the big-screen gauntlet Marvel began to methodically build a box office empire on the strength of its comic book backpages. DC Comics, their closest rivals, revelled in the phenomenon of Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy but the rest of their pantheon of titans remained dormant, waiting for an architect to chart their own extended universe.

As it turned out the man with the plan for DC's parent studio Warner Bros was an insider already adept at turning cult comic titles like *300* and *Watchmen* into filmic visions. Director Zack Snyder found himself handed the keys to Krypton, tasked to reinvent cinema's Superman in *Man Of Steel*.

A global box office success, Snyder's Superman – in the preternaturally handsome form of actor Henry Cavill – was framed as an omnipotent saviour of humanity with the potential power to kill millions even while trying to save them. This Superman was a little tainted by his godliness, bruised by confused public perception – and that, Snyder tells *SFX*, is a place he loves to explore. Rewarded by Warner Bros with the helm of the next chapter of Superman's story, Snyder found himself thinking beyond Kal-El's retold origin tale.

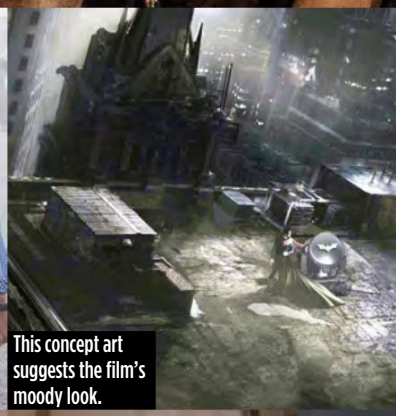
"We had a bunch of discussions after *Man Of Steel* came out about what we were going to do for a bad guy in the continuing saga," Snyder says, remembering the genesis of *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*. "We didn't want to make a sequel in the traditional sense, but we said, 'Let's kickstart another mythological storyline. Here's Superman and now we can start another path.' I said, 'What if, at the end of the movie, we saw Kryptonite being delivered to Wayne Manor?' The problem with that whole thing is when you go down the road of talking about Batman it's hard to have a better idea than that," he laughs. "At one point we said, 'Maybe Batman should fight Superman?' And then we were done, because you can't go, 'Oh, there's another guy he can fight who's better than that!'"

A fan of Superman in his younger years, Snyder admits shifting his attentions to Batman during his college days. He says he was especially inspired by Frank Miller's groundbreaking *The Dark Knight Returns*, the graphic novel that ultimately became a direct influence on his vision of the Gotham guardian. "Frank and I share an aesthetic interest and certainly his portrayal of an old Batman inspired me and rings true to me. It meets my standard for a cool superhero persona.

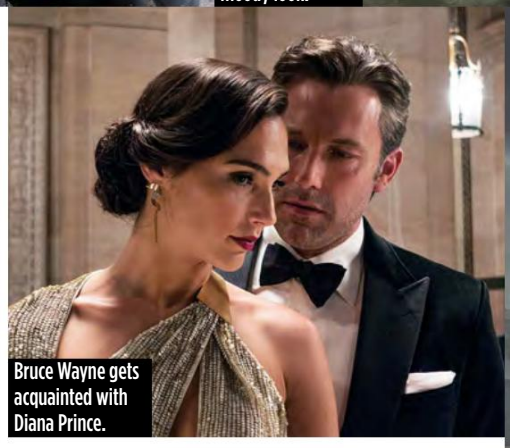
"And while I'm a fan of all the Batman movies, you are always looking for that little piece of the Batman movie that you want to make," Snyder shares. "Until we made this movie, I had never really seen a Batman that I wanted to see. I had to make him – and that's fun because I had a really clear idea of what I wanted Batman to be. It was simple for me. I really wanted an old Batman, not decrepit,

About to make a lot of mayhem...





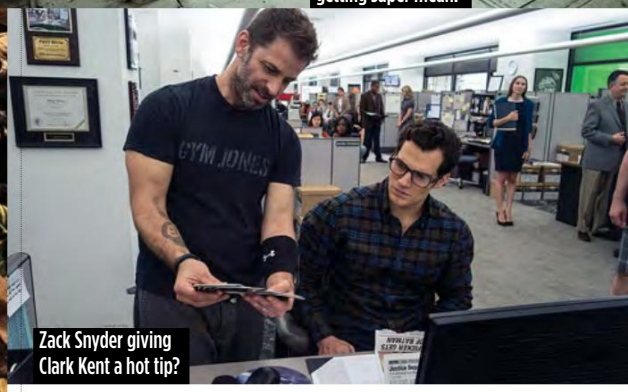
This concept art suggests the film's moody look.



Bruce Wayne gets acquainted with Diana Prince.


Superman or god...?


Shooting the Batfleck getting super mean.


Zack Snyder giving Clark Kent a hot tip?

but world-weary with a lot of experience."

Those weren't arbitrary traits in Snyder's mind, but crucial attributes to create a palpable contrast between Superman and Batman in their shared cinematic story. "From there, it became the work of doing the philosophical, opposition stances that would put them into conflict," Snyder explains. "For me, that was the fun part because I knew immediately that they weren't going to get along right out of the gate. They have common ground but their approaches are different. And their morality is different. Even though Superman is an amazingly benevolent and kind individual, the potential abuse is so staggering that you can imagine an anarchist like Batman would not want the potential human rights violations that could go on based on Superman's powers. It would be pretty scary for Batman so it was an easy fire to stoke in both of them. And Superman would not take kindly to someone he believed was acting as judge, jury and executioner, not respecting due process."




The trailer has an image that looks just like this concept art.


Concept art inspired by Frank Miller's take on the Dark Knight.

MORE MEANING

Snyder turned to Academy Award winning screenwriter Chris Terrio [*Argo*] to help him craft a story that explored the very core of the characters. "We have gone out of our way to try and imbue the movie with meaning beyond the comic book world," he emphasises. "Chris is super smart and he does his research but he's not a total dork. Well, he's academically a little of a dork but now he is totally a dork because he's read all the books. In the end he wants it to →



Bats rolls out the big guns in this concept art.



Looks like Alfred (Jeremy Irons) has some cleaning up to do.

mean something – as we all do – and to be about something."

Another goal was to create as much distance as possible from Nolan's trilogy in order for Batman to feel completely new to audiences imprinted with Christian Bale's performance. "It's a total and utter opposite reality from the Chris Nolan universe," Snyder reiterates. "Even the studio people asked who we were getting from the other movies and I'm like, 'Guys, let's all understand it's a different world.' Nolan and I talked about it and in the Batman universe that he created, Superman would have a hard time existing. I think that's why we did a reboot on the world to allow these characters to exist together."

HUGE STAR

Casting the new face of Batman became key to helping set this universe apart but Snyder says the hunt was a short one once he coaxed Ben Affleck to don the cowl. "Ben is like a movie star now in the greatest definition of that term," he enthuses. "We greyed his hair a little bit and his look is rugged. He's a great actor and a big person, all of 6'4" and in the boots he's 6'6". I don't like a small Batman," he chuckles.

Snyder says Affleck understood immediately what he was trying to do with this version of Batman. "From the start, he would say, 'Just tell me what to do.' And this shoot was gruelling, I gotta be honest," Snyder confides. "That costume is not easy to wear and it's raining and cold in Detroit and you're out there for hours. It's not glamorous at all."

But those conditions just hardened Affleck's Batman into the gritty vigilante Snyder needed to go up against Cavill's righteous alien. The

> **"It's the most Batman-y costume that's ever existed in movies"**

helmer says a vital visual parity was achieved in the actors' equal statures and in costuming that accentuated the bodies of his two leads rather than relying on physical armament. "The costume is the most Batman-y costume that's ever existed in the movie world, in the purest sense," Snyder says with pride. "I didn't want a hard suit. In the past, they have done variations of Batman looking like he's in armour of some kind. I've always been a fan of... not fabric, but some sort of Kevlar weave so it's more about the body."

There's a third icon whose debut in *Batman V Superman* will set the stage for the first live-action film top-lined by a female superhero. Wonder Woman, played by Israeli actress and model Gal Gadot, runs with the →

"IT TURNS INTO RAGE, ANGER AND A KIND OF OBSESSION..."
BEN AFFLECK IS THE DARK KNIGHT

You haven't done a summer blockbuster in a while. What was your reaction to being sent this script?
My first reaction was in terms of the way I think of Batman, which is the conventional way, so I thought I was too old and I wouldn't fit too neatly into that square peg. But Zack [Snyder] said, "Come down and see what my ideas are to do something different." I was really won over by this vision of an older guy, who is a brawler at the end of his run, asking more existential questions.

As a comic book fan, which of the two heroes appealed to you most?
I was more of a Batman guy. I think people identify more with Batman because Superman doesn't have any weaknesses. It's why Henry [Cavill] has a harder job than I do to try and make that character accessible.

What's Batman's beef with Superman in this?
To a certain extent, Batman starts the movie with this big injury – the Wayne Industries building is destroyed in the fight between Zod and Superman [in *Man Of Steel*]. He loses all of these friends and people who work for him so he feels terribly guilty and responsible. It turns into rage, anger and a kind of obsession. The anger traps him and it makes him see Superman in only one way and he can't let that go.

Since we get to skip the origin story this time, how did you "find" your Batman?
You see the origin briefly but you have other movies that did that heavy lifting for you. And you don't really play Batman, you play Bruce Wayne.

What was your relationship with the suit?
The suit was okay but not when they put the Mech-suit on top of it. And of course the director wanted it to be raining [laughs]. It doubled the weight of the suit because it absorbed all of the water. The cape itself, when full of water, was about 25 pounds and the whole thing was 100 pounds wet so that was when it was like, "Well, you wanted an old Batman..." I can promise you more action than I was up for doing. We've got visual effects, stunt cars, a Bat spaceship, the Batmobile chase, me fighting Superman... it's incredible. The spectacle blows you away. It's just staggering what technology in concert with good old fashioned thespians can do.
Tara Bennett

GETTY (1)

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"SUPERMAN UNBOUND WOULD BE A TERRIFYING FORCE..."

HENRY CAVILL IS THE MAN OF STEEL



How can Batman possibly stand a chance against Superman?

He's stood a chance in many ways throughout comic book history. The only person who can beat Superman is Superman himself. And I don't mean that literally – there are villains out there who can beat Superman, obviously. It's his limitations, his strictures, that are often the cause for his defeat. Superman unbound, Superman with everything unleashed, would be a terrifying force, and that is what Batman is scared of.

Can you compare the DC universe to the Marvel universe?

The Marvel universe definitely has a lighter touch. The DC universe, I think, is trying to ground itself a bit more in realism. But Marvel does the job very well and they've created a wonderful foundation to launch anything off. DC are now doing their thing, and building their own foundation. It's not going to be a cookie cutter thing – it's definitely going to work in a different way but there's only so much I can say about that because I'm only privy to so much information.

This is the your first chance to give us the classic bespectacled Clark Kent. Christopher Reeve played him as very much a disguise. What's your take?

It's not really a disguise because, let's face it, there's a lot of suspension of disbelief. He's wearing a bloody pair of glasses and you don't just go, "Oh look! I didn't recognise you!" It's more two aspects of the character. Both are Superman, both are Clark Kent but Clark Kent is very much a representation of the human he would be if he decided not to become Superman. And Superman is obviously the reflection of him living up to the potential which his space dad believed he could be. Both exist within the same bubble but are separate entities.

Is there a difference in the physicality of the performance?

There is. Imagine someone said, in a room full of very, very short people, whatever you do, don't stand out. And so you try and be as small as possible. And then when you get home you finally go, "I can stand up straight and be tall..." That is what Superman is. He's the guy who's at home who finally gets to be the being that he is.

Were you a Superman kid growing up?

Yes. And I'm a Superman adult [smiles].

Nick Setchfield



Shooting Supes meeting his greatest adversary, Lex Luthor – with hair.



If looks could kill. Actually, his can.



Snyder directs Amy Adams, our Lois Lane.

GETTY (1)

boys as the Amazonian powerhouse in the film's last act to fight Doomsday, the monstrous adversary Frankensteined from the remains of Zod (Michael Shannon) by Lex Luthor. Of the iconic moment teased in the first full trailer of the film, Snyder enthuses, "It's an amazing opportunity with these three titans of pop culture. It's the craziest IP you can imagine with Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman."

Snyder says he's particularly proud to introduce Wonder Woman to audiences before her solo origin film in 2017. "We really haven't had a female superhero of that magnitude," he says, sounding a little bemused. "It's an amazing opportunity for the world to get behind a powerful female character. Half my movies, even *Dawn Of The Dead*, have female leads so I'm not surprised by female superheroes. I'm just shocked it hasn't happened earlier."

FIRST LADY

Part of the DC team responsible for casting the role, Snyder admits it was an epic search. "We tested a bunch of actresses, as we did with Superman. I think we tested six but interviewed and saw hundreds. It was a pretty exhausting process. But the thing with Gal is she's strong, beautiful, a kind person but fierce. And when we did the test and she did the scene with Ben, she held her own. Ben was like, 'Whoa! That girl is something else.' That was a good sign [laughs]. And over time, as we've




Some pretty tasty tech: the new Batmobile.

“We’re just turning everything up to 11 as much as we can”

gotten to know her, she’s been amazing.”

It’s that kind of universe building, via character, casting and chemistry, that Snyder loves, and feeds his epic cinematic sensibilities. With his input, there’s now a whole roster of DC heroes to play with, from Jason Momoa’s Aquaman to Ezra Miller’s Flash. And even with the massive responsibility and pressure to land *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*, Snyder has been multi-tasking on the macro level, making sure that cast will be well positioned for his convergence film, *Justice League Part One*, that will finally bring DC into the realm of Marvel Cinematic Universe style ambition.

“I love comic books and the potential for that kind of madness,” Snyder says of the set-up they’ve been building towards. “We’ve been talking a lot about *Justice League* and knew what it was going to be pretty early on so it allowed us to lay the right groundwork. When you see [*BvS*], you get a sense there is a second layer coming, as far as what’s possible, how we slowly introduce the other characters, how they play and their purpose in the world.”

“*Justice League* is my next movie and we’re just turning everything to 11 as much as we can,” Snyder says of what’s to come. “All of these heroes are trying to work together – if that’s possible – and that’s fun to me.” Snyder pauses as if letting the potential of what he’s building settle in. And then he closes the conversation with a beaming, optimistic smile. “It’s an exciting time.”

Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice opens on 25 March.


No glasses in this disguise.


Heroic concept art: let’s hope the film measures up.




Shortly to be putting the action in “Action!”



He's got the whole world in his hands.

REX (1)

IN THE RED CORNER...

THE MAN OF STEEL

All-Star Superman writer **GRANT MORRISON** on why Kal-El soars highest...



Superman's a better idea than the bomb. When I was a kid the bomb was the biggest thing in my life, because my parents were activists. The bomb was this horror to me. Then I discovered Superman. Here was a guy who, if the bomb went off in his face, it might give him a mild tan...

I always related to Superman, because he was so kind. I didn't really relate to the Marvel heroes because they were so angry and they were always fighting each other. Superman was a moral exemplar. Especially if you're a little kid – he truly is a moral exemplar, more so even than Jesus. Because Jesus doesn't fly around and punch things and fight dragons. That made Superman cooler!

Superman is the emblem of our better selves. He's everything we want to be in situations where we feel threatened and vulnerable. *All-Star Superman* was intended to be quite domestic. He's got a dog, he's got a house, he's got a girlfriend, and he's got problems with all of it. Just because his house is an arctic fortress filled with these treasures doesn't mean it's not just his house. He has to take Krypto for a walk. He takes him for a walk around the rings of Saturn, but he's still taking his dog for a walk. He still has problems with his girlfriend.

His emotions are written on this large-scale cosmic canvas, which makes even a visit from your relatives into an epic drama. You've got your friends, but they live in the future... So I came to feel that the key to Superman stories was to just tell domestic stories about human emotions but on this giant canvas that made them mythic. Because that's how we feel inside – everything's mythic. You break up with your lover and it's an agonising destruction of a romance. It's *Romeo And Juliet*.

AND IN THE BLUE CORNER...

THE DARK KNIGHT

Batman writer **SCOTT SNYDER** on why the Dark Knight remains eternal...



Batman is enduring because at the core of the character Bruce Wayne's money doesn't matter, or any of Batman's gadgets. All of that stuff is really fun, but ultimately it's a story about somebody who faces tremendous challenges, someone who faces this incredible adversity in childhood. The worst thing that can happen to a kid happens to him. And yet instead of giving up or seeing life as something that is meaningless, he turns it around and creates this engine for himself to become the greatest hero of all time. And he creates meaning for other people in the world. He takes a random, meaningless act of violence, and turns it into this fuel for himself, to become the pinnacle of human achievement, and to become someone who inspires other people to matter and to do things that matter. While he strikes terror into the hearts of evildoers in Gotham, he's also a source of inspiration for anybody that is facing challenges. To me, that kind of folk hero is forever a powerful emblem. Especially in American folklore. That figure who overcomes his greatest fear to become this hero and tells us not to be afraid is everlasting.

That is what primarily interests me about the character. But I'm also interested in where that starts to become pathological. I love how Batman himself is always sort of at odds with himself. On the one hand he's out to inspire people, but he also is out to terrify certain people. On the one hand, he sort of puts himself out there and sacrifices himself every night; but on the other hand that also leads to incredibly self-destructive behaviour. He's mortal, he's immortal, he's all of those things at once. He kind of exists at this intersection of heroism and self-destruction. I think there's something richly interesting there. **Joe McCabe**



Inspiring... yet also terrifying.

THE AMAZING SUPERHERO ISSUE

KINGDOM OF THE BLIND

As Matt Murdock prepares to face the Punisher in *Daredevil* season two, Stephen Kelly speaks with the Man Without Fear himself, Charlie Cox





One of the most impressive things about the Marvel Cinematic Universe is its patchwork of genres. Political thrillers, period pieces, pulp sci-fi – it's a world that can seemingly tell any story, so long as they're stitched together with a tone that's fun, bright and bloodless. So yeah, you could argue that it was *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, or even *Ant-Man*, but Marvel's greatest gamble was probably last year's *Daredevil*, the dark and gritty Netflix series that featured a man being beaten to death with a car door.

"I remember reading that bit [in the script] and thinking, 'This is like *Lock, Stock And Two Smoking Barrels*!" says Charlie Cox, the English actor tasked with bringing the Man Without Fear to life. "It was a surprise. It just read differently, very mature, very sophisticated. Even off the page it shocked me, it shocked me to read it. But then I don't think you can do this with other comic characters. I think if you did it with Spider-Man it'd be invalid. Whereas with Daredevil, with the Frank Miller '80s stuff, the comics themselves are a very similar tone to the show."

There's no way to know how many people actually watched *Daredevil* (Netflix doesn't release its ratings data), but it's fair to say that, critically, the gamble paid off. For although its tone was unusual for Marvel, its quality wasn't. Series one established *Daredevil* as an intense, violent and *Wire*-esque study of organised crime – a hallmark of showrunner Steven S DeKnight, the *Buffy/Angel* writing veteran previously responsible for the blood-soaked *Spartacus*.

SENSES WORKING OVERTIME

It also managed to do what Ben Affleck in 2003 could not: do justice to Matt Murdock – blind lawyer by day, vigilante by night. In case you missed season one, the story goes that Murdock was only a child when he was blinded by a toxic chemical spill, an accident that causes him to develop superhuman senses. He can hear the faintest heartbeat, feel the slightest movement and, well, you probably don't want to know what he can smell. ("I imagine," says Cox, "that when someone really lets one rip, he has to leave the room.")

Although created by Stan Lee and artist Bill Everett in 1964, the Daredevil of Netflix is very much the son of a pre-*Sin City* Frank Miller, who reinvented Murdock as a lonely, tortured Catholic in the '80s – one who weaponised his senses to protect his neighbourhood and avenge his father (a boxer murdered by mobsters after refusing to throw a fight) but feels conflicted about doing so. Indeed, *Daredevil*'s first series – a slow-burning, →


On his way to confession?

13-episode origin story – cast Murdock as a man struggling to rise to the occasion, both through the law firm set up with best friend Foggy Nelson (Elden Henson), and his fight against terrifying gangster Wilson Fisk (Vincent D'Onofrio). It's a ballsy move, but there's a reason why we only see the red suit in the series finale's heroic hour. As Cox says: "That first season was all about the evolution of Daredevil, of the birth of that hero. But in season two, one of the main questions we're posing is what exactly is a hero, what defines and makes one? The same goes for a villain."

FRESH FACES

That question is raised through two new arrivals in Murdock's life: former flame/deadly assassin Elektra Natchios (Élodie Yung) and new vigilante on the block, Frank Castle (Jon Bernthal), aka the Punisher. The latter, especially, is a walking, talking challenge to everything Daredevil believes in; a man whose outlook is starkly black and white, who prefers to murder criminals rather than arrest them.

"Initially," says Cox, "he sees Frank Castle in the same way that he saw the Kingpin, as someone who is a force for evil and needs to be brought to justice. But he begins to learn more about Castle, the more he spends time with him. He learns that they're not actually that different from one another. They've both lost family to crime, their opinions on bad guys are quite similar. It's just their methods that differ.

"Also, I think what becomes very disconcerting is that the public start to make comparisons between the two, and he starts questioning who he is all over again. It forces him to question the ethics of what he's doing, which I think is really scary, because it leads him to a crossroads where he has to say, 'Either I have to change my methodology, or I have to do more,' and that probably means doing what Castle does – to take it to a further degree in order to be more effective in suppressing criminal activity. Or, he has to give it up all together. And I think both of those options are impossible to him. The idea that he'd have to make one of those choices is his worst nightmare come true."

"I'd love to be Daredevil in a Marvel film"


One of these people can swing from high rooftops.

As for Elektra, it looks like she'll be causing a different kind of trouble – namely for Karen Page, Murdock's friend and, in the comics, love-interest.

"The Elektra, Matt and Karen triangle is one that I think a lot of people, both men and women, will recognise," says Cox. "Karen and Elektra pose completely different prospects for Matt, both of them valid. Both seemingly know him and understand him and can offer him what he needs. But neither of them have the whole story, the whole picture. Most young men, myself included, have had a relationship with someone like Elektra: someone who pushes all the right buttons, who appeals to your dark and crazy side, where it's very emotional and exciting and probably not very good for you."

Beyond a change in showrunner – with Doug Petrie and Marco Ramirez having taken over from DeKnight – the greatest shift for *Daredevil* series two is pace, with the show no longer having to be weighed down by set-up and introductions. Take the fact that during its first series, Murdock doesn't come face-to-face with Fisk until the ninth episode whereas here he confronts Frank Castle in the first, with their drama said to build and build until it becomes chaos. Not to mention an action sequence that, according to Cox, takes that staggering one-shot corridor fight from



Oi, that's cheating!

episode two and "puts it on crack".

"We really hit the ground running," he says. "The way I like to think of it is that in the first season Matt Murdock happened to Hell's Kitchen – people heard rumours about him, he turned up here, he turned up there, this mysterious man in black. In the second season it feels like the world happens to Matt Murdock. Everything comes on top of him, and it all gets too much. He's trying to control everything, keep everything in order, and he can't do it. We see a hero beginning to unravel."

ACROSS THE UNIVERSE

One of the more intriguing things about *Daredevil* season two is that the show is now part of its very own shared universe – within a shared universe. *Jessica Jones*, which premiered last year, showed that Marvel's Netflix shows were developing their own patchwork of genres – this time stitched together with a tone that's consistently dark, moody and surprisingly adult. It also proved to be the universe's first crossover, with Murdock's medic mate Claire Temple (Rosario Dawson) popping up to aid ramshackle PI Jones (Krysten Ritter) and her soon-to-have-his-own-series lover Luke Cage. Eventually, they will all unite, alongside the yet-to-be-cast Iron Fist, for Netflix's very own Avengers: the Defenders. Does Cox think Daredevil and Jones will get along?

"It's going to be interesting, isn't it? She doesn't seem to get along with many people. But I guess nor does Matt. That's going to be such an interesting dynamic, and it's going to be even more complex when you include Luke Cage and Iron Fist. Who knows what that dynamic's going to be? And who knows what the tone of that show's going to be? So yeah, I'm really excited to see how that all pans out."

And how about the big screen? Does he think that one day Daredevil will be called upon to fight alongside the likes of Iron Man, Thor and the Hulk? After all, directors Joe and Anthony Russo have said that 67 characters are being considered for 2017's *Infinity War*. Surely they can squeeze him in?

"You know, I reread *Civil War* recently – I'm not in *Civil War*, I should say, I'm not in that film – but if you watch Daredevil in the comic, he's pretty similar to the character we portray in the show. He's in the background, he doesn't engage in much joviality. He's kind of a little bit annoyed and bored of the whole thing. So maybe not. But then again, it's important to Marvel that all these characters can co-exist in the same universe. Maybe I'm just biased. I'd love to be Daredevil in a Marvel film."



Daredevil is on Netflix from 18 March.

NETFLIXERS ASSEMBLE

Building a street-level universe



JESSICA JONES

●● Starring a former superhero suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder, last year's *Jessica Jones* was one of the boldest stories Marvel have ever told. It's just been renewed for a second series.

LUKE CAGE

●● He was introduced in *Jessica Jones*, but later this year the man with the unbreakable skin is set to star in his own series. Not much is known about the plot, but it's said that Rosario Dawson will also reprise her *Daredevil* role as Claire Temple.

IRON FIST

●● It's early days for *Iron Fist*, which is set to see long-missing kung-fu master Daniel Rand make his long-awaited return to New York City. No one has been cast yet and there's no news on when it's due to film.

THE DEFENDERS

●● The big one. Daredevil, Jessica Jones, Luke Cage and Iron Fist all teaming up as a gritty, small-screen Avengers. Executive producer Jeph Loeb has confirmed that the miniseries will start filming after all the other individual series.





THE AMAZING SUPERHERO ISSUE

A TIME FOR HEROES

Faster than a speeding bullet! *SFX* previews the superhero movies soon to make a stand for truth, justice and the blockbuster way...





Move over Magneto, there's a new Big Bad in town.

X-MEN: APOCALYPSE

Prepare for both physical and emotional devastation as the X-saga enters the '80s

DIRECTOR Bryan Singer
STARS James McAvoy, Jennifer Lawrence, Michael Fassbender, Oscar Isaac
RELEASED 19 May

Brace yourselves. The *X-Men* universe is about to be torn apart.

The franchise returns in May, and though this latest entry has many intriguing elements there's one major talking point. Yes, it's set 10 years after *Days Of Future Past*, so we can expect some fun with '80s trends. Yes, it'll reinvigorate the series by introducing younger versions of Jean Grey, Storm, Cyclops and Nightcrawler. And yes, James McAvoy's Xavier will *finally* become a slaphead. But the main attraction is the titular Big Bad...

Apocalypse. Played here, beneath bright blue prosthetics, by *The Force Awakens*' Oscar Isaac, he's very aptly named. This ancient mutant's abilities make Magneto's look miniscule. After centuries of slumber, he has awakened – and surveying his kingdom, he is mightily displeased with what he finds...

The character's appeared in many storylines, but perhaps the key one was '90s arc *Age Of Apocalypse*, set in a world where Professor X's death created a radically altered timeline. Speaking to *SFX*, director Bryan Singer and X-producer/co-writer Simon Kinberg confirm that this series was an influence – but only one of many.

"There's a lot that we're drawing from the comics, as we have with all the previous movies," Kinberg says, "and there's a lot of licence that we take. It's a combination of a lot of different arcs from the comics, and even some arcs from the animated show. That's something Bryan's always loved, and we watched back a couple of different versions of the Apocalypse story together. So there's quite a bit of *Age Of Apocalypse* in it, but it's different as well."

"The biggest influence was that I wanted to meet every single character at the opposite place they were when we last saw them," Singer adds. "That was my biggest inspiration from the *Age Of Apocalypse* concept – flipping everyone around."

With Apocalypse delegating some of the devastation to his "Four Horsemen" – Angel, Storm, Psylocke and Magneto – we can expect disaster movie imagery on an epic scale. But the two filmmakers are keen to emphasise that this wrap-up of the "origins" X-trilogy which began with *First Class* will have impact of the poignant variety too, not just the falling masonry kind.

"This movie's very emotional," Singer says. "It's got some very intense, emotional stuff happening."

So much so that while devising the story, the director found himself repeatedly blindsided – partly because of his own changed personal circumstances, after he fathered a son by friend Michelle Clunie (born in January last year).

"There's a lot about family. And I just had a child myself. The idea of family – whether it's your blood family, your friends, your tribe or your team – is a very big part of this movie, and I guess that makes it even more special to me now my best friend, Michelle, and I have this lovely boy together.

"So it's interesting," Singer continues, thoughtfully. "When I was developing the script with Simon, I'd suddenly be in tears, and start getting emotional about this stuff. And it's a comic book movie! I'm like, 'Okay, hold on,' and Simon's like, 'Oh, he's doing that thing again...' 'Hey Simon, you have two kids, okay? This is new to me!'" **Ian Berriman**

TO THE POWER OF X!

Two more mutant movies heading to the screen

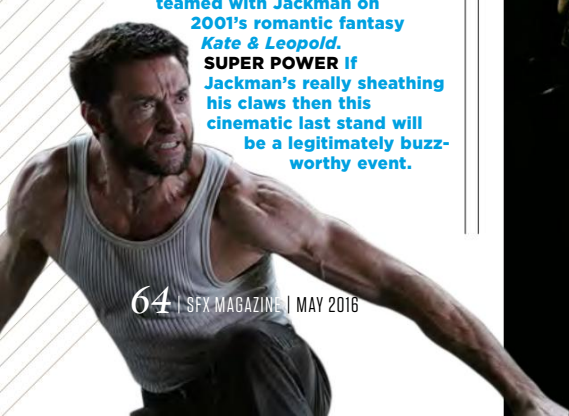


GAMBIT

DIRECTOR Doug Liman
STARS Channing Tatum, Léa Seydoux
RELEASED 2017
IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE It's Fox's X-universe expanding with a solo film for the fan fave Cajun mutant with the lethal poker hand. Pitched as a slinky heist caper rather than a trad superhero slamdown, it's set amid the murk of the New Orleans underworld. ***SPECTRE***'s Léa Seydoux plays Bella Donna Boudreaux, plasma-blasting daughter of the head of the Assassin's Guild.
SECRET ORIGINS Veteran comic book X-scribe Chris Claremont wrote the original treatment.
SUPER POWER ***Edge Of Tomorrow*** and ***The Bourne Identity*** proved Doug Liman can craft propulsive, imaginative action flicks.

WOLVERINE 3

DIRECTOR James Mangold
STARS Hugh Jackman, Patrick Stewart
RELEASED 2 March 2017
IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE It's the third – and, Hugh Jackman vows, in between pumping iron and necking raw chicken milkshakes – final adventure for the adamantium-enhanced hero. "I've got three words for you guys: Old Man Logan," teases the star, hinting that the film will riff on the dystopian comic book tale that saw Logan roaming a future ruled by supervillains.
SECRET ORIGINS Mangold first teamed with Jackman on 2001's romantic fantasy ***Kate & Leopold***.
SUPER POWER If Jackman's really sheathing his claws then this cinematic last stand will be a legitimately buzz-worthy event.



He has the power.

DOCTOR STRANGE

DIRECTOR Scott Derrickson
STARS Benedict Cumberbatch, Rachel McAdams, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Mads Mikkelsen
RELEASED 28 October 2016

IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE It's a whole new supernatural seam for the Marvel Cinematic Universe as Benedict Cumberbatch assumes the cloak of Stephen Strange, headstrong neurosurgeon turned hex-casting master of the mystic arts. Far-flung filming locations include Nepal and Hong Kong but the plot will hurl us even further out, into the hitherto unseen occult realms of Marvel's back pages. Freakiness ahoy! From his sorcerous goatee to his silvered temples, Cumberbatch looks like pure comic art, summoned to life by some forbidden spell...

SECRET ORIGINS *Back To The Future*'s Bob Gale wrote a screenplay for *Doctor Strange* way back in 1986, so long ago that the Ancient One had zits.

SUPER POWER We're already salivating at the thought of a big-screen take on Steve Ditko's mindbending dreamscapes from the comic books. IMAX psychedelia, baby!



WONDER WOMAN

DIRECTOR Patty Jenkins
STARS Gal Gadot, Chris Pine, Connie Nielsen, Robin Wright
RELEASED 23 June 2017

IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE It's a movie with a ton of pressure on the muscular Amazonian shoulders of newcomer Gal Gadot: not just the first superhero blockbuster directed by a woman (*Monster*'s Patty Jenkins) but the first superhero blockbuster with a female lead. The World War One setting is an intriguing departure from the well-worn '40s milieu of the original comics – we're promised a trenches-era period epic, packed with extras – while *Star Trek*'s Chris Pine brings full-beam charm to roguish love interest Steve Trevor.

SECRET ORIGINS *Speed*'s Sandra Bullock was approached to wield the lasso of truth back in 2001, when a *Wonder Woman* movie was first in development.

SUPER POWER From *Lucy* to *The Hunger Games* there's a clamour for female-led action franchises. This feels like the cultural sweet spot for the DC demigoddess to finally hit the screen.





Just who you want on your side...

SUICIDE SQUAD

DIRECTOR David Ayer
STARS Jared Leto, Margot Robbie, Will Smith, Joel Kinnaman, Viola Davis, Cara Delevingne
RELEASED 5 August 2016

IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE It's the DCU daring to go beyond the dependably bankable icons of Batman and Superman as a crew of supervillains get drafted for the blackest of black ops missions. Helmer David Ayer impressed with *Fury* and *End Of Watch* – gritty action flicks filled with flashes of wit and humanity – and this looks set to be an entertainingly skewed take on the superhero genre. The presence of ancient sorceress the Enchantress among this soup of sociopaths means the DCU beats the MCU to the occult frontier by two months...

SECRET ORIGINS DC debuted the original, heroic *Suicide Squad* in 1959. The supervillainous variant followed in 1987, the creation of John Ostrander.

SUPER POWER The sheer psycho-sass of Margot Robbie's Harley Quinn committed Grand Theft Trailer and we're damn sure she's going to steal the film, too.



"Tell me honestly, is there such a thing as too much gold in an outfit?"

TO BE CONTINUED!

Four more superpowered blockbusters hurtling your way...



GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL 2

RELEASED 28 April 2017
James Gunn returns to helm the sequel shenanigans – and play DJ for the ragtag cosmic scoundrels as he cherrypicks another cassette-friendly soundtrack. Expect serious daddy issues for Peter Quill – the plot's powered by the search for his mysterious father – and an appearance from '70s Avenger Mantis.

SPIDER-MAN

RELEASED 7 July 2017
Reboot piles upon reboot as Tom Holland assumes the Wall-crawler's mantle – and Marvel's flagship character is finally folded into their big-screen universe. At just 19 Holland's the youngest screen Spidey and we're promised an authentically angsty high school take, just like the earliest Lee/Ditko tales.

THOR: RAGNAROK

RELEASED 27 October 2017
The god of thunder's back and he's not alone... Mark Ruffalo's Hulk has been enlisted to bring a big, green buddy movie sensibility to the third *Thor*. The title promises all-out Asgardian apocalypse but helmer Taika Waititi (*What We Do In The Shadows*) has a sly touch.

JUSTICE LEAGUE PART 1

RELEASED 17 November 2017
***Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice* was just the warm-up act. Zack Snyder's *Justice League* – potentially such an epic it's being split into two parts – assembles the entire DCU frontline for big screen action. Surely only Darkseid is a big enough threat for Warner Bros to go to Def-Con Cape...**

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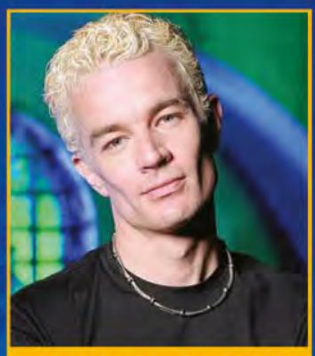
MATT RYAN
CONSTANTINE & ARROW



AMBER BENSON
BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER



ERIN RICHARDS
GOTHAM



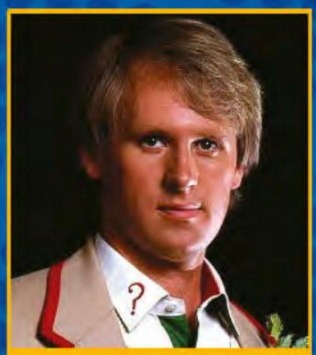
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STAN LEE'S GUIDE TO WRITING SUPERHEROES

True believer Jordan Farley sits down with the mighty STAN LEE for a comic book writing masterclass

It's impossible to underestimate Stan Lee's impact on the superhero genre. At Marvel in the early '60s Lee revolutionised the idea of what a comic book hero could be – no longer gods who walked among us but flawed, believably human characters whose problems weren't always of the world-ending variety. His remarkable creative legacy is still paying dividends to this day, the entire Marvel Cinematic Universe built on a bedrock of characters he co-created, and Lee is showing little sign of slowing down with superpowered crime show *Lucky Man* currently on the air. When it comes to superheroes, frankly, there's no one better qualified, which is why we turned to Stan the Man for a 10-step guide to writing the ultimate superhero story. Excelsior!

STEP 1 POWER UP

"The superpower comes first, because everything really has to be built around: what is the hero's superpower? For example, with Spider-Man, I had the idea of a character who'd have the power of a spider, who could stick to walls and build a web. And then, you build your story around the character who has that particular power. There are many stories that don't involve people with superpowers. But if there is a superpowered character, I believe you have to first be very familiar with the superpower, know how you're going to handle that, how it'll fit in with the story, plot and so forth. Because that's always the most important part of a character's identity – what they can do that nobody else can."



Spidey triumphs over adversity in *Amazing Spider-Man* #33.

STEP 2 PUSH THEM TO THE LIMIT

"I think it's of paramount importance to give your characters a weakness. If the character, like Superman, cannot be hurt or injured, if they can do just about anything, I don't feel that's as interesting as worrying about a character who might have a superpower, but could also be wounded, killed or frustrated physically in any sort of way. The most important thing in my case, when I work on a superpowered character, is to find out: what weakness does that character have? And then, to me, it becomes more interesting. Sure, they can do something →



Our hero swings for the first time in 1962.



GETTY

nobody else can do, but they'd better watch out because if so and so happens, that would hurt them too. Then you worry about the character. If you're not concerned about the character, if you're not concerned about them getting hurt or being killed, then it's not as much fun in an action story."

STEP 3 COMPELLING CHARACTERS

"A character being interesting has nothing to do with superpowers. I think it's the same rule that Charles Dickens would have used, or Mark Twain or Shakespeare or anybody. You've got to have a character who, regardless of the superpower, is somebody that is interesting, somebody you care about, somebody who you feel if you knew this person, you'd want to be friends with him or her. You have to like the character. Once you like the character, then you can worry about what is going to happen to that character. If you don't like the character, if you don't find the character very interesting, then the whole story becomes... I won't say meaningless, but you're not as involved in it if it's just about somebody you don't care much about one way or another. And the superpower has nothing to do with that."



Villains don't come more multi-layered than Victor Von Doom.

STEP 4 COMPLEX VILLAINS

"The more complexity you can give a villain the better it is. The more complex they are, the more interesting they are. There's always got to be the moments of indecision on the part of the reader. 'I wonder what will happen. I wonder what decision he'll make.' And so forth.

If the character is cut and dry, and very obvious, and you always know what the character will do and say, and there's no unpredictability and there's no suspense, then you have a story that isn't as interesting. But even though these characters are fictional, you try to make them with as many different personality quirks as possible, as any human being has."



And the result of all these shenanigans was... the Incredible Hulk.

STEP 5 GIVE THEM A HOME

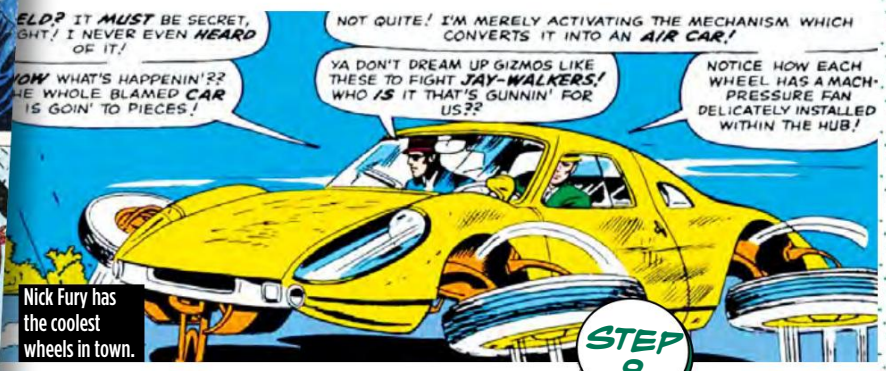
"The location is very important to me as a writer – and I imagine to any writer – because if I have characters whose adventures take place in New York, I can handle that very well because I know New York so well. If you're



And one day, far in the future, Josh Trank would destroy them.



Peter Parker embarks on his new career in *Amazing Fantasy* #15.



Nick Fury has the coolest wheels in town.

making up an area you can do that well, but there's no identification on the part of the viewer. It's just a fictional city. It's sort of like Batman, he's in Gotham City. Superman, he's in Metropolis. Well, Metropolis is sort of an amalgam of a million big cities. To me, it's more interesting if he's in London, Paris, New York. You know that city and you can identify with the background scenes."

STEP 6 STORY RULES

"A good story is a good story. You of course have to adapt it to the medium you're working in. If it's for a comic book you have to tell it very quickly, and you've got to think of very interesting visuals, because people are looking at these illustrations all the time. If it's for a movie you can be more leisurely, if it's for a TV series you have to think of it in terms of episodes, and how you can keep the interest going from episode to episode, and how you can make the viewer want to watch each succeeding episode. So you always have a little bit of a different problem but the story, the basic story, has to be pretty much the same."

STEP 7 KEEP IT REAL

"Even though these are very fictional stories about characters that are fairytale-ish in a sense, the more reality you can bring to them, the better. The same with an automobile. If I have a character driving a car, I'd want them to drive a Chevrolet or a Rolls-Royce or some car you know about, rather than call it a Whizzbang V8 or something. The more realistic you can make the story seem, when you're writing about characters who obviously are far beyond being realistic characters who can fly and have good luck and all of that, then the more reality you can bring to it and the better it makes the story."

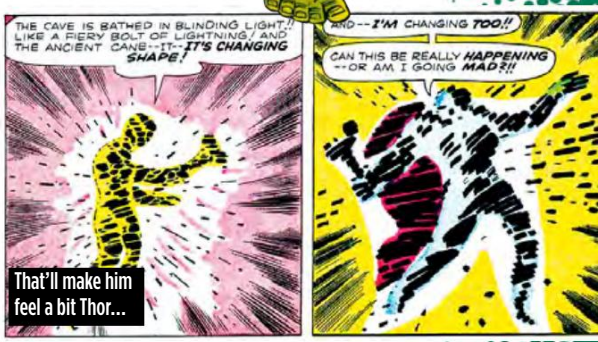
STEP 8 AMAZING ALLITERATION!

"I have fun with the alliteration. It's just a little stylish thing I do. I don't know that it makes it any better or worse, but I'm amused by it. The dialogue in general is very important, because you've got to have your characters speaking the way they would speak if they were flesh and blood. You've got to always keep them in character. And the way you keep a character in character is usually by the way he or she speaks."

STEP 9 NEVER STAND STILL

"The characters have to always be doing things that are interesting. Certainly in superhero stories, you need a lot of action, a lot of physical action. Even in real life, we all move around a lot. We don't get into fights to save our lives, but there's always a lot of movement and action. And in an adventure story, you just play that up even more than in real life."


Stan's characters just don't get on sometimes.



That'll make him feel a bit Thor...





Will we see this scene in this year's *Doctor Strange* movie?

STEP 10 STRIVE TO SURPRISE

"The more surprises you can have in a story, the better it is. Each time the reader sees something he or she hadn't expected, that makes it more interesting. Now, those surprises can't be ridiculous. They have to be within the character of the people you're writing about. If you can anticipate everything that's going to happen in a story, you're not nearly as interested in that story as you would be if suddenly you see a scene and you say, 'Wow, I never expected that. Oh, that's terrific.'" ●

Lucky Man is currently airing on Sky 1.

ALL IMAGES © MARVEL



Time Machine

THE STORY BEHIND THE SCI-FI & FANTASY OF YESTERYEAR

2006-7

CIVIL

With CIVIL WAR set to rage in Millar tells Stephen Jewell about



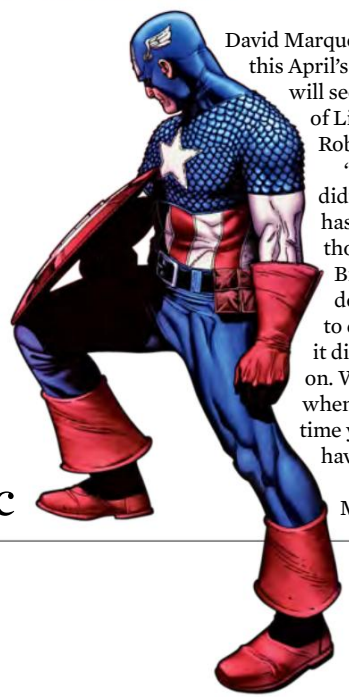
It's been described as "Marvel's equivalent to *Watchmen*" in terms of sales figures but Mark Millar never suspected that *Civil War* would become such a huge phenomenon when he began writing the seven-issue miniseries just over a decade ago. Pitting the government-aligned forces of Iron Man against a rebellious Captain America and his allies, the Steve McNiven-drawn crossover was initially designed as simply 2006's answer to event books like *Secret Invasion* or *Fear Itself*. But after becoming the biggest seller of that year, the collected edition has since become one of Marvel's biggest selling graphic novels ever, shifting over half a million copies to date and still ranking as Marvel's top-selling trade paperback in 2015. Now set to spawn its own comic book sequel in May in the form of Brian Michael Bendis and



THE AMAZING SUPERHERO ISSUE

WAR

cinemas this April, Mark the secret origins of his comic



David Marquez's *Civil War II*, it also forms the basis of this April's movie *Captain America: Civil War*, which will see the Marvel Cinematic Universe's Sentinel of Liberty Chris Evans coming to blows with Robert Downey Jr's big screen Shellhead.

"When Steve and I were first doing it, we didn't think that it would be as enormous as it has turned out to be," says Millar. "We just thought it would be our summer event because Brian Bendis and Olivier Coipel had already done *House Of M*, and it was kind of our turn to do one. We just thought it would be lovely if it did well, so we were delighted when it caught on. We knew something funny was happening when the orders for the first issue came in. By the time you count up all the variant covers, it would have done around 450,000 copies."

Now known for his creator-owned Millarworld series like *Kick-Ass*, *Wanted* and →



"Avengers scrap like dockers!" more like it.

> "In the real world if somebody had superpowers, I'd like them to be registered"

The Secret Service, which have given rise to their own Hollywood blockbusters, the bulk of Millar's Marvel output prior to *Civil War* had been confined to the offshoot Ultimate universe. Having reinvigorated the concept of the Avengers in his seminal run on *Ultimates* alongside Bryan Hitch, he also enjoyed stints on *Ultimate X-Men* and *Ultimate Fantastic Four*. However, *Civil War* presented Millar with an opportunity to have a similarly seismic impact upon the House of Ideas' main superhero universe. First pitched by him at one of Marvel's regular creative summits, it actually grew out of a potential storyline he had devised for the Merry Mutants.

"We just sat around for three days and, as we always do at these things, we spent the first couple of days plotting everything out and then chatting about it," he recalls. "A couple of the guys had an idea for a crossover but we just didn't really like the sound of it. You hate to be the guy who complains that something isn't working but I could see it in the other guys' faces, as it was a good story but it just didn't seem right for a big company crossover. I'd had this idea for a civil war among the X-Men, which Bryan Hitch and I were going to follow up *Ultimates* with."



Covering similar territory to 2011's similarly divisive *Schism* storyline, *X-Men: Civil War* would have seen Wolverine and Cyclops falling out over the future direction of mutantkind. However, Hitch's unavailability prompted a rethink. "Bryan was taking longer on *Ultimates* than expected and he wasn't going to be ready until around 2007," continues Millar. "But I still wanted him to draw it, so I said 'why don't we leave the X-Men out of this and do *Civil War* as a big summer event?' [Fellow Marvel writer] Jeph Loeb then came up with this really great catchphrase, which was 'Whose side are you on?' and *Civil War* ended up becoming a more Avengers-centred event, although I never ended up doing that X-Men crossover, as I then went off and did *Kick-Ass*."

Both founding members of the Avengers but polar opposites as characters, Iron Man and Captain America made for natural figureheads to head up the rival factions. "One represents the past and one represents the future, but they both represent America," reasons Millar. "If you think about it, Tony Stark's entire business model is based on anticipating future trends, as to where America and the world is going, while Steve Rogers was born when your grandfather was born. So it seemed obvious that they would clash when it came to where to take the team next, which would probably be in very different directions."

While Steve Rogers has sometimes been perceived as a glorified political lackey, Millar believes he's always been a considerably more independent spirit than often given credit for. "There's this criticism where people sometimes think of Cap as this guy who follows the government line, but ultimately Captain America is a symbol of freedom," he says. "He doesn't represent the government, as much as he represents an idea. He follows the flag; he doesn't follow the particular president as such. So Cap would be kind of romantic and say, 'We can't work for the government, we have to be free agents like the Lone Ranger.' Whereas Tony Stark would think, 'Well, at the same time, we can't have the Avengers running around and knocking down buildings without a licence.' That led some people to think that the series was about secret identities, but it wasn't really to do with that. It was more about, 'Should superheroes work for the government or not?' and that idea was encapsulated in Captain America and Iron Man."

ULTIMATE COMPLIMENT

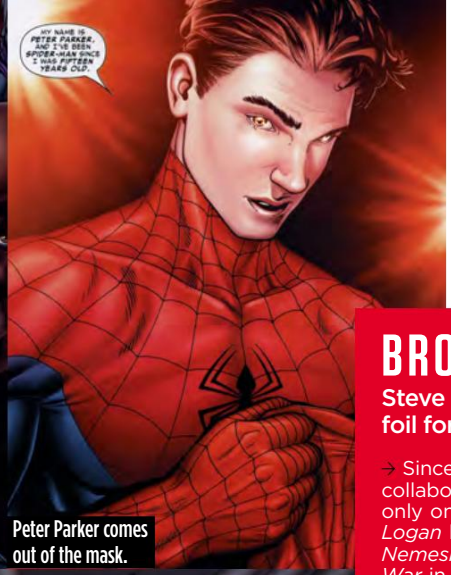
Millar makes his mark on the Marvel movies...

→ After successfully transplanting his creator-owned properties like *Kick-Ass* and *The Secret Service* to the big screen, watching *Civil War* will be a novel experience for Mark Millar as it is based on a comic book that he doesn't actually own. "Up to now, I've kind of been spoiled, as there's been four movies so far of the Millarworld characters," he says. "But whenever I see films like *Avengers* and I notice something that they've adapted from *Ultimates* or one of my other books, then I just see that as a bit of fun, and I honestly don't think about it all that much. I worked at Marvel until 2010 and I had a fantastic time there. But I'm now focused on my own stuff, so I just go and see those movies as a fan."





Keep it Civil, Cap...



Peter Parker comes out of the mask.


So, as the man asks, whose side are you on?

BROTHERS IN ARMS

Steve McNiven is the perfect foil for Mark Millar

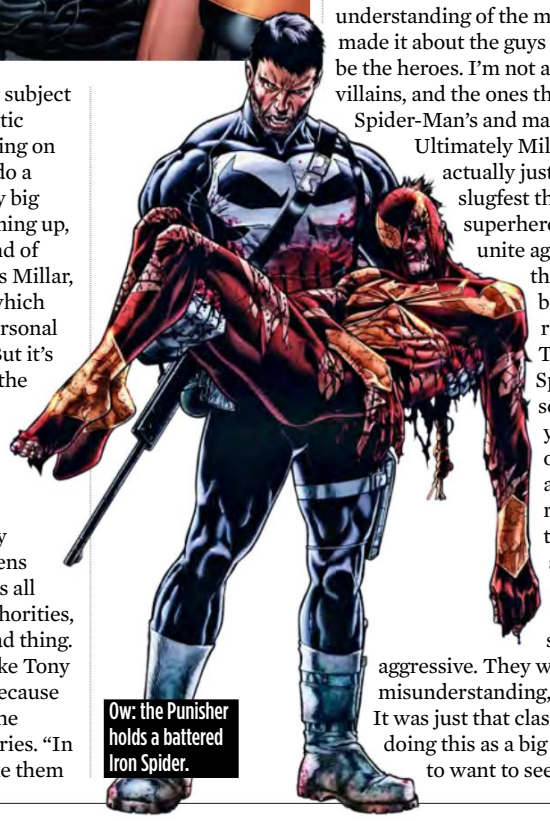
→ Since *Civil War*, Millar has collaborated with Steve McNiven not only on 2008 Wolverine epic *Old Man Logan* but also on 2010 Icon miniseries *Nemesis*. Both are poised to join *Civil War* in cinemas with the former reportedly providing the inspiration for 2017's next Wolverine solo outing, while the latter will hopefully soon be heading into production via Warner Bros. "We've actually only met once," says Millar, "so we don't really know each other apart from through email, but for some reason, there seems to be a creative chemistry between us that works well in a comic book."



The misapprehension that *Civil War* explores the subject of superhero aliases perhaps stems from #2's dramatic climax, which sees Spider-Man sensationally revealing on live TV that he is actually Peter Parker. "When you do a large event like that, you have to do something really big and we knew that there was a Spider-Man story coming up, where he was sort of going to be rebooted, so we kind of had a licence to do anything we liked with him," says Millar, referring to 2007's controversial "One More Day", which erased numerous elements of the Wall-Crawler's personal life, including his marriage to Mary Jane Watson. "But it's funny that it received so much attention because in the book itself it only takes up three or four panels."



Introduced after a New Warriors operation in the small town of Stamford Connecticut goes horribly wrong, culminating in an explosion that kills dozens of people, the Superhero Registration Act requires all superpowered individuals to sign on with the authorities, which Millar maintains wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing. "Weirdly, some of the other writers would often make Tony the bad guy, which I thought was a strange choice because I was actually on Tony's side," he says, referring to the various spin-off titles that accompanied the main series. "In the real world, if somebody had superpowers, I'd like them to be registered in the same way that somebody who has a gun has to carry a licence. But a gun can kill several people while a superhero can kill several thousands of people, so on a pragmatic level I'm 100 per cent on Tony's side. Maybe on a romantic level, Cap's position makes sense but I don't think anybody in the real world would really want that."


Ow: the Punisher holds a battered Iron Spider.

With the exception of a new incarnation of the Thunderbolts, which saw the likes of Bullseye, Taskmaster and Lady Deathstrike press-ganged by Iron Man to track down the renegade Captain America and friends, the bad guys take a backseat for the majority of *Civil War*, a move that suited Millar, who preferred DC Comics as a child. "I read Marvel when I was very young, so I have a broad understanding of the main characters," he says. "So I just made it about the guys that I knew, which just happened to be the heroes. I'm not all that familiar with the Marvel villains, and the ones that do appear are essentially Spider-Man's and maybe the Fantastic Four's as well."

Ultimately Millar argues that *Civil War* was actually just an extension of the obligatory slugfest that usually occurs whenever two superheroes first meet before they eventually unite against a common foe. "I always thought it was a traditional comic because the Marvel comics that I did read as a kid always seemed to be Thor vs the Hulk, or the Hulk vs Spider-Man," he says. "There always seemed to be these titanic battles, and you'd always have two heroes going off at one another. I always saw that as a very Marvel thing, as you never really saw Green Lantern fighting the Flash or whoever. DC always seemed to be more grown up and 'yes, we'll work together on this problem,' while the Marvel guys seemed to be quite teenage and aggressive. They were always meeting, having a misunderstanding, fighting and then becoming friends. It was just that classic structure, and I thought, 'If I'm doing this as a big Marvel event then readers are going to want to see that on a grand scale.'" ◕

Close Encounters

FACE TO FACE WITH THE BIGGEST STARS

TOM HIDDLESTON

The Brit star faces a towering urban nightmare in *High-Rise*

Words by Jamie Graham /// Photography by Maarten de Boer

Producer Jeremy Thomas – the man behind David Cronenberg's startling take on JG Ballard's *Crash* – has been trying to adapt the author's eighth novel, *High-Rise*, since its publication in 1975. Now, finally, it's come to be, with Thomas handing the gift/curse of a gig to so-hot-right-now director Ben Wheatley, who has corralled an extraordinary cast of principals, including Tom Hiddleston, the dashing Brit star who won an entire Tumblr fandom with his portrayal of Asgardian lord of mischief Loki in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Why did it take so long to make it to the screen? Because its satire is dark, savage and "out-there", as the faltering technology of a state-of-the-art London tower block instigates a descent into madness and chaos. Slap-bang in the centre of this orgiastic bedlam – grinning, sweat-soaked, face covered in blood – is Hiddleston's sophisticated and normally mild-mannered Dr Robert Laing...

You researched JG Ballard extensively before making *High-Rise*...

He was a trained physiologist; he went to Cambridge to read medicine for two years. Once he'd done "anatomy" – once he'd studied the engineering of the human body – he gave up. He wasn't interested anymore and became a writer. All the way through his life, he's interested in the link between what you can physically find in the body, and the patterns of human behaviour.

Were you familiar with his writing before the movie came along?

Only in so far as I remember a friend of mine reading *Super-Cannes* in university and being interested in it then. I'd seen Spielberg's *Empire Of The Sun* which I thought was amazing, and was aware of short stories. But I was not particularly an avid reader [of Ballard]. And then I became obsessed with him after I read the screenplay to *High-Rise*. I read *Concrete Island* and *Crash* and *The Drowned World* and some of his short stories and his autobiography, which is amazing, *Miracles Of Life*. That's when I became aware of him as a really revolutionary thinker.

You had the novel of *High-Rise* with you on set...

Ballard gives you beautiful stage directions. "Laing half-expected the insomnia so many of his neighbours had suffered had been some kind of unconscious preparation for the emergency ahead." You think: what a great note.

As an actor, what can you do with that?

It puts your head in a place.

Talking of getting your head in a place... why does no one leave the High-Rise as chaos descends?

At a certain point, you will probably reach a new kind of relaxation and calm, where you begin to accept how it goes. You find that with people in the war zones: initially you experience body shock because of the fact you're being bombed every day and people are dying; after a certain point, there's only so much adrenaline your body can create and you just start to accept a new existence.

The characters in the book remain rather detached throughout...

We haven't done that all the way through the film. There has to be a way you see Laing change. And Wilder and Royal and Charlotte, and lots of the other characters. There's a turning point. I think this is one of Sienna [Miller]'s lines... she says, "It's as if everyone has agreed silently to cross some sort of line." And once you've crossed the line, there's no going back, like the mask is off and everyone's true colours have been revealed. It's sort of war from then on in.

You covered your script with copious notes. Is that your usual way or working?

It really depends. This was just helpful because of the way the film's been scheduled, actually, due to actors' availability and location stuff. It's been absolutely disjointed, so I haven't had any sense of chronological progression. I've had to join the dots, like assembling an alphabet out of order.

Even with your notes, it must have been both testing and taxing, to hop around like that?

I remember on our second day, I was doing a scene [that takes place], like, two-thirds of the way through the film. Things were on fire, the lifts were broken down. I'd been Laing for one day, and I was already having to take a wild stab in the dark of who Laing, at that point, would be. You have to live it. [Grins] It was more fun than should conceivably have been allowed. I think Ben's tastes, mixed with Ballard's sensibility, creates this amazing range of extremes. Some days it's about sophistication and refinement and an air of mischief and cool – adults behaving badly. And on other days, it's just how far do you dare to go into the heart of darkness?

High-Rise opens on 18 March.

Biodata

Occupation
→ Actor
Born
→ 9 February 1981
From
→ Westminster, London
Greatest hits
→ *Thor, War Horse, Avengers Assemble, Only Lovers Left Alive, Thor: The Dark World, Crimson Peak*
Random fact
→ Hiddleston graduated from Cambridge University with a Double First in Classics, and is fluent in French, Spanish, Italian, Greek and Latin.

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"JG BALLARD GIVES YOU BEAUTIFUL STAGE DIRECTIONS"



The Dark Art



The Witch is HERE,
and WANTS *your* SOUL.
NICK SETCHFIELD *enters* THE WOODS
to find the man behind the most
SPINE-RATTLING *movie*
of the year...



It's Finchy! Yes, *The Office* actor Ralph Ineson plays William.



"I'm not original," confesses Robert Eggers, writer and director of *The Witch*. "I just read older books than most people..."

With his majestically sculpted hair and statement beard he has the look of a man who should be fronting some searingly hip Brooklyn five-piece. But a sense of America's strange, arcane history trails Eggers, infects his blood. Raised in a tiny New Hampshire village – population 400 – he spent his childhood playing among tumbledown Colonial farmhouses and concealed woodland graves, filling the rural landscape with imagined ghosts. Every Halloween he would make a pilgrimage to Salem, site of the 17th century witch trials whose paranoia and dread played directly into his award-winning debut feature.

He smiles. "There was a time when I thought, 'Am I writing a story or is this a master's thesis on witchery?'"

Eggers immersed himself in the past to create *The Witch*. He pored over authentic folk tales and contemporary accounts of sorcery while forensically studying the Geneva Bible to nail the authentic language of his God-fearing Puritan clan, torn apart by inexplicable events in a bleak, twilit New England. As he tells *SFX*, it was an act of curation as much as creation.

"Initially I was hitting the New York public library," he remembers. "It was a very affordable method of research! The big epiphany was that – apart from the extreme intelligentsia – in the early modern period the real world and the fairytale world were the same thing. So you see folktales and court records of witchcraft and the same tropes are appearing. It's the same kind of witching. This was really cool. So what are the tropes that are always there? Those need to be in the film. What are the tropes that speak most personally to me? Those need to be in the film. What are these weird, half-forgotten, exotic things that somehow still have power? Those really need to be in the film. And that's how I worked on constructing the story."

BACK TO THE PAST

The Witch, he knew, also had to be built on physical truth. Shot in a remote, abandoned lumber town in Canada, beyond the reach of mobile signals, far from the 21st century umbilical cord of Wi-Fi, the film's sets were constructed using building materials accurate to the period. From reed-thatched roofs to mud-dung walls to hand-forged nails, Eggers was obsessive about historical fidelity. The devil, fittingly, was in the detail.

"A witch riding on a broomstick is not a metaphorical truth for today. If we're going to believe in that we need to be in a world where that was the case. And so that meant creating to the best of my ability a completely authentic, believable world. The goal was that this was a puritan's nightmare uploaded into the audience's mind's eye."

Crucially, Eggers wanted to explore the cultural faultlines that led to the hysteria of the witch trials.



Anya Taylor-Joy doesn't find much joy as Thomasin.

"At the time of the witch craze it's all about this obsession with the dark feminine," he shares. "We have this idea of the persecuted, innocent earth mother and that is very true, but there was this prevalent, absolutely intense idea of evil witches. They weren't just something that men in political and religious power thought existed. The lay people, everyone, had this idea of the witch. And so the witch, in the early modern period, is everything that men fear, their fears and ambivalences about the power of women, and women's fears and ambivalences about themselves and their power in a male-dominated society.

"We read stories about women who we imagine would today be diagnosed with some kind of mental illness and they really thought that they were evil witches who had murdered their own children. That idea is really tragic and really interesting to me. Unfortunately the shadows of all this stuff still live in the unconscious of today. As much as thankfully we're not living in that kind of society, this stuff can still resonate, because archetypes exist."

At the heart of this wilderness fable is Thomasin, eldest daughter of devout Calvinists exiled to an isolated farm on the edge of brooding woodland. When a baby disappears in her charge she becomes the locus of the dark impulses that will tear the family apart. Eggers is quick to praise his young star, Anya Taylor-Joy, also making her cinematic debut.



Hang on, those kids are *laughing*...

> "THERE WAS THIS PREVALENT, ABSOLUTELY INTENSE IDEA OF EVIL WITCHES. THE LAY PEOPLE, EVERYONE, HAD THIS IDEA OF THE WITCH"



Slightly creepy kids, who'd have thought it?

"Anya is very charismatic and mysterious," he tells *SFX*. "You don't know what's going on with Thomasin and as much as we shove the camera two inches from her face there's still something mysterious going on there. That was crucial. Also with Anya it seems like there's no way in hell she could be a good puritan. That was crucial. Originally I had planned on someone a little more homely and awkward and then I realised that wasn't really going to work. It needs to be someone who everyone sees as the black sheep. Anya looks like a fairy princess alien. She doesn't look like a stale bread good puritan should. And her facility with language is really incredible, especially since she's not a trained actress. There was not a lot of coaxing. She just gets it. I was super fortunate to have her in the film."

The director knew he was taking his cast – including very young children – into some psychologically unsettling places.

"When I was in my early twenties the Kubrickian idea of terrorising actors seemed really romantic and fun," Eggers admits. "I don't really believe in that now. We had a week of rehearsal where we could really trust one another because when you're going into these dark places I think it's really important to have all the safety equipment necessary to get out of the crevasse again. That's how we worked with the adults, with Anya. With the kids the younger they got it was more like mannequin work, where they had a sanitised, Disneyised understanding of what this story is. There was a lot of, 'Stand there, hold your mouth like this, widen your eyes a little bit...' And then you throw a witch in there and a little blood and a little music and all of a sudden it seems like they're really out of control. But it was safe."

One Kubrick inspiration Eggers acknowledges is the power of stillness. *The Witch* lingers, slowly accumulating its dread. →



Pschological fears in Ingmar Bergman's *Cries And Whispers*.

THE HORROR, THE HORROR

Robert Eggers talks true screen terror



"I don't like a lot of horror films. I like Hammer films, I like Universal stuff. I grew up with all that but I don't find it very satisfying because it's not actually asking questions about darkness. A lot of times – and I think this is also really cool – genre fans can overintellectualise these things and make them much more profound than they actually are. Which is totally cool. But Ingmar Bergman's the scariest horror film director that I know. *Cries And Whispers*, *Through A Glass Darkly*... those are affecting, those are horrific, when they're talking about the darkness in humankind. With most horror films it's teenage masochistic titillation and you're going to the edge shining a flashlight and then running away laughing at whatever you see. Well, that's cool, and I get how it's fun, but you're not really going at it."



REX (1)



William gets his chopper out – but can he get wood?

> "I THINK WHERE THE FILM IS SUCCESSFUL IN A HORROR WAY IS BECAUSE OF WHAT I LEARNED FROM WATCHING THE SHINING"



Thomasin is blamed for the witch's malevolent deeds.



That's Black Phillip, the film's devilish goat.

Is slowburn his natural style or just the one that suited this film?

"I tend to watch movies that are much less entertaining than movies I would like to make. This is Michael Bay pacing compared to some of the movies I like! I really like *The Shining* and that's all over this movie – embarrassingly so, I think. Even though I'm a little bit ashamed of it I think where the film is successful in a horror way is because of what I learned from watching *The Shining* a trillion times. Keep the frame still. There's tension in stillness."

We know his research is painstaking, his attention to historical detail meticulous. How methodical is he in constructing his scares?

"Quite methodical, I guess," Eggers smiles. "There are a couple of jump-scares in the film and I think that's kind of necessary. I don't think that's necessarily cheap if it's the right moment. The whole thing was very, very designed. I tried to work really hard with restraint. Even when we have a reveal it's dark enough and brief enough that the audience can finish it with their own imagination and it can be more personal and scary to them. This is a cliché but it's true: when you see the monster it's always disappointing. So while I have this obsession with fairytale imagery I want to be able to articulate a witch visually, if only for 11 frames or however long it is..."

The Witch has earned Eggers considerable heat, winning him a directing award at Sundance and the kind of admiring noises that can quickly christen a fellow The New Voice of Horror Cinema if he's not too careful. He's in line to helm a remake of 1922's silent undead classic *Nosferatu* ("a masterpiece") and is now developing his first studio movie, a tale of medieval knights and the supernatural – "Like *The Witch* it's the fantastic, mythological, religious stuff of that world existing in a world that is tangible and authentic. I'm very excited."

SWITCHING GENRES?

A restlessly intelligent man, you wonder if he'll be content to stay within the horror genre.

"Yeah, I really want to make a schlocky romantic comedy," he deadpans. "No, my primal narrative has been the same as long as I've known myself. We are always in the act of becoming ourselves – that's Goethe, I think – but as we become more secularised it's all about science and numbers. Science fiction films are where we're asking interesting questions but for me the dead speak a lot louder. So I'm interested in the past. Comparative religion and mythology and esoteric traditions and folktales and fairytales... This is what I spend my whole time on, my professional time, my free time... except for some time watching *Seinfeld*, with a beer.

"Fairytales are entertaining but fairytales are these archetypal truths. The ones that didn't fall off the wagon of verbal history are the ones that really work and moralistic, Disneyfied versions... well, I don't think those are going to be around in 200 years. I don't think anyone's going to give a shit because they aren't truthful about a human experience. Real fairytales are like, 'That was great!' And then you're like, 'What the fuck was that?'"

The Witch opens on 11 March, and is reviewed on p96.

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SO... WHAT THE HELL IS 10 CLOVERFIELD

In 2008, a monster hit New York without warning. On 15 January 2016, the first trailer for the CLOVERFIELD sequel hit an unsuspecting internet just as hard. So what *do* we know about JJ Abrams' mysterious new movie?

With the project admirably shrouded in secrecy, just as *Cloverfield* was, all we have to go on are the two brief trailers – and Super Bowl TV spot – released so far, and the knowledge that this film was originally called *Valencia*, reportedly an unrelated script featuring a bunker that has been reworked to be part of the *Cloverfield* universe.

The story focuses on John Goodman as Howard, sharing a bunker deep underground with an injured man (John Gallagher Jr). Michelle (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) arrives after a car crash and is told there's been a chemical attack, so she can't leave. Thinking Howard could be nothing more than a crazy survivalist, she wants out. But is he right?

Producer JJ Abrams says: "We wanted to make it a *blood relative* of *Cloverfield*." So does this story take place during the initial attack, to different characters? Or does it happen afterwards? We never find out what happened to New York in the original movie, but clearly somebody, probably the military, found the footage and categorised it, indicating there were survivors. But how many? We hear Howard declare, "Everyone outside of here is dead..."

The original film never explained its title; we simply had on-screen text that said: "Multiple sightings of case designate 'Cloverfield'". Is this the name of the monster?



Below This could get a little messy...

LANE?

The experiment that created it? And why are we in 10 Cloverfield Lane now? Perhaps this film is actually a *prequel* to the original, and ground zero for the monster, hence giving it its name...

Mind you, the viral marketing for *10 Cloverfield Lane* says that Howard worked for a company that is part of Tagruato, a Japanese drilling firm working on the seabed. Many theorise that Tagruato – who were mentioned in *Cloverfield* – were the ones who awoke the monster. So did Howard realise what they'd done, and make preparations for the apocalypse?

The marketing also suggests that Howard built the bunker for his daughter Megan, and it cost him a lot of money. She doesn't seem to have received his messages about it. Michelle *isn't* her, that we know; so where is the real Megan? The trailers are full of images of the Eiffel Tower (right) – maybe she's in Paris.



The fact that the bunker doesn't seem to contain any modern tech is curious: everything's stuck in the '70s/early '80s. Has the attack stopped digital technology from working with some kind of pulse weapon? We see Michelle waving her phone, trying to get a signal. Of course, she's underground, but it could be a sign that time has stopped in that place. Why?

Below Escaping a madman? Or wriggling towards a doomed world?



Perhaps it's all misdirection. Perhaps Howard has been down there for decades, the leader of a tiny doomsday cult. Gallagher Jr's character has a sling, so did he get that fighting with Howard while trying to escape? The hatch to the upper world looks suspiciously like the hatch from another Abrams project, *Lost* – and that was a giant red herring, too.

The gigantic monster in the original film dropped deadly parasites in its wake, so there could be a *lot* of monsters outside. And that's without a possible alien menace: we see something fall from the sky at the end of *Cloverfield*, variously identified as a Japanese satellite that wakes the monster, and a spaceship. If it's the latter – have more landed? The trailers do contain bright lights, rising ominously above the house...



Above Even in an underground bunker, you want a nice view.

As for the filmmakers: JJ Abrams produces alongside pal Bryan Burk (*Star Trek*, *Lost*). And just as *Cloverfield* was staffed by virtual unknowns, so it is here, too. Dan Trachtenberg is a first-time director, and writers Josh Campbell and Matthew Stuecken are virtual newbies (though adept in other roles in filmmaking). The big gun on the screenplay is Damien Chazelle, Oscar-nommed for *Whiplash* last year.

This much we do know. "Something's coming..." **Jayne Nelson**

10 Cloverfield Lane is out on 11 March.

Brought THE SFX AUTHOR INTERVIEW To Book

STELLA GEMMELL

The Brit fantasy author tells us how she got started as a novelist

Words by Jonathan Wright /// Photography by Sue Jackson

In an era when publishers expect authors to be seen and known as well as read, even the usual online biographies for Stella Gemmell are surprisingly sketchy. This, it turns out, is down to the writer herself. "They're sketchy because I'm not particularly interested in talking about myself," she says. "With some really dazzling exceptions, writers are generally a dull bunch, living and working inside their own heads, pouring their emotional resources into imaginary friends."

Well, that told us, and it's perhaps revealing that Gemmell, widow of the late David, prefers to be interviewed by email. Nevertheless, we're keen to know more because, as her new book *The Immortal Throne* shows, she's a novelist of real power. It's a sequel to *The City*, an epic fantasy set in an ancient and vast state that's been at war for centuries, and where a rebellion is brewing.

"The new book's about what happened next, and a bit about what happened before *The City*," she says. "When you've shaped a dense, multifaceted world (said one reviewer), teeming with characters you like, it's very tempting to go back. The most enjoyable thing about being a writer, for me, is putting familiar characters into a new situation and knowing exactly how they'll react and what they'll say. Sometimes it's more like watching a movie and faithfully reporting on what's happening, rather than a work of imagination."

Nevertheless, it takes a while to reach the point where characters take on lives of their own. In the case of *The City*, says Gemmell, that came about 100 pages into her first draft when she realised her plan to write a crime novel "set in a fantasy world because I didn't want to do the research" was morphing into "a sort of fantasy-sci-fi hybrid".

UNDER THE SURFACE

In addition, adds Gemmell, the books are rooted in her fascination with the way cities are built upon earlier urban iterations. "The Troy of *The Iliad*, of Priam and Hector, is only one (number seven) of multiple Troys going back millennia, all piled one on top of one another on quite a small hilltop site," she says. "The same is true of London, of course, where under the new towers lie thousands of years of history, crumpled buildings and bones. Ancient rivers still flow towards the Thames under the present-day concrete and tarmac, some of them known about but perhaps many unremembered."

But there are limits to the way authorial intention shapes books. "My husband used to say that everything you've seen and heard, and the experiences throughout your life, swirl around continually deep in your mind," she says, "and a writer is lucky enough to be able to tap into that and reuse it to craft his own stories. I'm in my sixties now and I've spent a lifetime reading books, and watching movies and TV. I suspect I've never written an original word in my life."

Gemmell says she's conscious of some of her influences, and that *The City* owes much to *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* and the *Aliens* movies ("not the fourth one"). Against this, she says, she thought she'd made up the name Archange, until she "stumbled on the original Archange... in a book I didn't much like". She adds: "Dave often used to find that – something he'd written that he thought was pure imagination turned out to be in a book he read as a child."

RESEARCHING A WORLD

As to how Gemmell got started as a novelist, her late husband had a key role. The two met while they were both journalists. Over time, as David Gemmell's career took off, Stella "became more involved with his books". When he wrote the *Troy* series, she researched the late Bronze Age and the latest archaeological work on the city. "He got to the stage in the first book, *Lord Of The Silver Bow*, when a group of characters arrive at Troy for the first time and he asked me what it would be like for them, what would the great city look like to someone who'd come from the sticks, what would it smell like, what would you hear. Rather than me tell him about it, so that he could put it in words, he suggested I write the scene myself. I was thrilled to be asked and we were both pleased with the result so after that I carried on writing scenes to order."

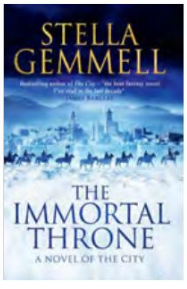
When her husband died in 2006, Gemmell completed the final *Troy* book, *Fall Of Kings*. In the worst circumstances imaginable, she was up and running as novelist. Was she ever worried people would think she was cashing in?

"Yes, a little," she says. "A friend told me I needed to get a move on with *The City*, and finish it and get it published before people forgot the Gemmell name. That gave me pause. But I'd always wanted to write a novel and I'd had a couple of ill-advised stabs in my thirties. But it was years after Dave died that I decided to try again and finally finished *The City*. And it would have been perverse of me to submit the book under any other name. If some of his fans think I'm cashing in on Dave's success then so be it. People believe what they want to believe."

The Immortal Throne is published by Bantam Press on Thursday 24 March.

Biodata

Occupation
→ Novelist
Born
→ "In that long pause for breath between the end of the Second World War and the coming of the modern era, the '60s."
From
→ Hastings
Greatest Hits
→ Since completing *Fall Of Kings*, Gemmell has written two novels: *The City* and *The Immortal Throne*.
Random Fact
→ Gemmell says she had an idyllic Enid Blyton childhood, "running about in fields with chums, climbing trees, making camps, poking into ponds for newts".



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"I SUSPECT I'VE NEVER WRITTEN AN ORIGINAL WORD IN MY LIFE"

COLD WAR

Winter is coming to the land of THE HUNTSMAN in *Winter's War*. Joseph McCabe braves the chill...





Hans Christian Andersen's classic fairytale "The Snow Queen" clearly still has the power to enchant. It transfixed today's kids in the form of recent Disney blockbuster *Frozen*, after all. So it's little surprise that Andersen's frosty femme fatale has been summoned into the world of sword and sorcery for the follow-up to 2012's *Snow White And The Huntsman*. The "Ice Queen" Freya (played by Emily Blunt) now joins her sister, Snow White's "Evil Queen" Ravenna (Charlize Theron), battling Huntsman Eric (Chris Hemsworth) in a film that's being sold as both prequel and sequel.

As first-time feature film helmer Cedric Nicolas-Troyan – an Oscar-nominated visual effects director on *Snow White* – tells *SFX*, it was an opportunity to raid the storybook realm for inspiration.

"The story expanded to, 'What other characters in the fairytale world do you have?'" says the French-born director, who replaces *Snow White*'s Rupert Sanders. "The thing with fairytales is they're always simple stories. About children – children are eaten or stolen or they don't have parents – or love. Whether you lose the love of your parents, you lose the love of your fiancé, or you're looking for love, whether you go up in a giant beanstalk to save the love of your life... All these simple stories resonate with everyone, and they've been doing so since they were first told. In the beginning they were told, then they were written, then they were read, and then they were drawn and became cartoons, and now they're movies just because today they can be done. Before they couldn't be done, and so no one was making them. Because how do you make a witch become a dragon? Now a movie can show that. When you look back and ask, 'What are the big characters?' the Snow Queen is one of them. →



"And then you cut the granny out of the wolf's stomach."



Director Cedric Nicolas-Troyan on a chilly-looking set.

"IT HAS AN *INDIANA JONES* FEEL..."

CHRIS HEMSWORTH is The Huntsman



How do you compare this sequel to *Snow White And The Huntsman*?

We wanted it to be lighter and more fun, with more sense of adventure. The first one I'm proud of, but it was very heavy, serious and dark. We're getting away from that. The script is funnier and lighter. The visuals, the colours, the aesthetic is all brighter. It reminds me of *Willow*, or has an *Indiana Jones* feel to it, hopefully.

Is it true you enticed Jessica Chastain to come on board at the Critics' Choice awards?

Yeah! I remember the first thing she said was, "Do I get to kick ass?" I said, "Hey if you're interested, we'll make sure that happens." And she's been fantastic. When she was first in conversations, when Emily Blunt was in conversations, when Charlize was in conversations to come back, I thought, "God, if we pull this off, that's hugely exciting."

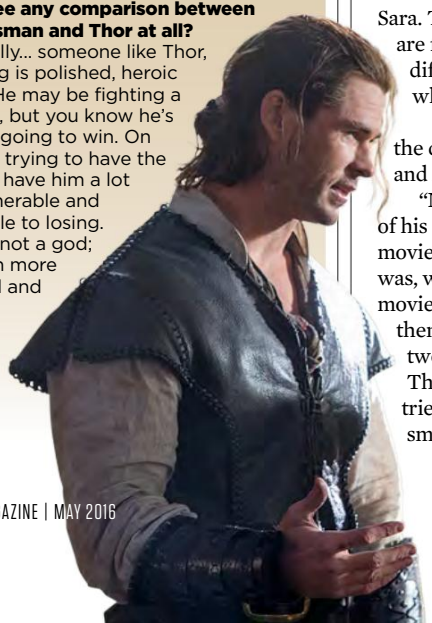
It's very female-driven. Did that appeal and would you consider yourself a feminist?

Oh yeah, for sure. My mum's a big feminist! That's another thing I thought was great tonally: the strength of it was in these three women and their performances, the heart and soul that they blended through these characters.

Do you see any comparison between the Huntsman and Thor at all?

Not really... someone like Thor, everything is polished, heroic and big. He may be fighting a big villain, but you know he's probably going to win. On this we're trying to have the opposite; have him a lot more vulnerable and susceptible to losing. Also he's not a god; he's much more grounded and human which is a nice change.

James Mottram



This character that's lost a sense of love, and has a cold heart. That is a very simple character yet one that resonates with everyone."

Freya's heart is so cold, in fact, that when she creates the corps of Huntsmen to do her bidding, she forbids them to fall in love – a rule Eric breaks when his heart is ensnared by the warrior Sara (Jessica Chastain).

"Sara is Eric's wife. He talks about her in the first movie. She died. We explore that and explore how she died, and what really happened. Freya is part of the story of where the Huntsman comes from and why he's called the Huntsman. Of course there are many Huntsmen. We explore what they are and where they come from."

Though mainstream action films are often accused of lacking strong roles for women, *Winter's War*, Nicolas-Troyan points out, is first and foremost "about women".

"It's about different types of women, at different moments in their lives. There's love, there's love lost, there's motherhood, there's wifehood. There are different aspects of the lives of women, in a world that is principally ruled by women. The story is the story of the Huntsman, obviously. It's his story. But it's his story within this world, surrounded by all these different female characters. Ravenna is very different than Freya, and Freya is different than Sara. Then we have the female dwarves, who are funny as hell, to explore a completely different part of the female character, which is independence and spunkiness."

Joining the returning Nick Frost to play the dwarves are newcomers Sheridan Smith and Alexandra Roach, as well as Rob Brydon.

"Nick has a little bit more of an exploration of his character, Nion. Because in the first movie we really didn't know who this character was, what this character was about. In this movie, you've got the whole story going on and then the Rob Brydon character, Gryff, and two female dwarves that are kind of a team. They're a little team that goes around and tries to make a living out of dealing and smuggling things. They're really funny...

The thing with the dwarves is that they are characters who are just an open faucet of thoughts. They don't process everything. They're just really raw characters. They speak their minds. That creates the situations between them.

"Also, we discover that female and male dwarves don't get along very well. They don't typically live together as couples. They're a little bit like pandas! So that creates a lot of funny moments between them... I think people are going to be surprised by how funny the movie is. We did a preview a couple of days ago, and people were like, 'Holy crap! I had no idea it was gonna be this fun!'"

Nicolas-Troyan describes *Winter's War* as lighter in overall tone than *Snow White And The Huntsman*, though more balanced in its mix of drama and humour.

"It's a lot lighter. There are two parts to the story. There is a darker story that happens with certain characters, then there is a lighter part of the story that happens with other characters.

> "It's about different types of women, at different moments in their lives"





Sara (Jessica Chastain) stares down Ravenna (Charlize Theron).

But it's very well balanced. It's not like you're jumping from one movie to another. It's not that at all. But there's variation... Like in your day. You're gonna have moments when it's gonna be a little more dramatic and moments when you're gonna relax a little bit more and joke around. You're not going to go through your whole day laughing your ass off and you're not going to go through your whole day wanting to jump from a cliff. It's the same way with these characters. One of the great things about the Huntsman character is that he comes in and out of dramatic situations and finds a way to be lighter in some moments, throughout the whole movie. So it doesn't get down and dark all the time."

The filmmaker also describes *Winter's War* as richer in its fantasy elements, a result of its two enchantresses. "We saw battles in the first movie. In this one we are trying to do something a bit different. There's a little bit more magic. Magic spells are happening more often than in the first one. We'd look at different types of fight scenes to change things up a little bit. We already did the big charge in the first movie, so we're not going to do that another time. We do different stuff but it's as big as the first movie. I just didn't want to do the exact same thing. Some things are being recalled, like the enchanted forest for example. But then we're doing something new in it."

As for anyone who may already be drawing comparisons between the Ice Queen of *Winter's War* and the Snow Queen of *Frozen*...

"The Ice Queen is a fairytale character who has been portrayed many, many times. But because the last portrayal was in *Frozen*, people are like, 'Ooh, it's Elsa!' But it's like, 'Yeah, well, guess where Elsa in *Frozen* comes from? There have been plays, books, stories of the Ice Queen or the Snow Queen or the Snow Princess. And there will be many more. It's funny, because Elsa's just the one that just happens to be right there on your doorstep.' What can you say? I'm like, 'Yeah, it's Elsa. Or Narnia. Or 20 other versions of it that you can find around the world.'"

The Huntsman: Winter's War opens on 8 April.

GETTY (2)

"I THINK FAIRYTALES HAVE BEEN DILUTED"

EMILY BLUNT is Freya



How did you find having Charlize Theron as your sister in *The Huntsman: Winter's War*?
It was so fun having a Queen-off with Charlize! She's the best. Such a pro. She doesn't take any of it seriously, which is just how I like to work as well.

How would you describe Freya's relationship with Theron's Ravenna?
Freya has never had the absolute evil core that Ravenna has. I think that Freya has always maintained somewhat of a moral compass, even though her heart has been turned cold against the world. It's something of a struggle [for Freya to be evil], and that greatly disappoints Ravenna. I think she resents that. She sees it as weak.

How did you find your inner Ice Queen? Did you practise throwing ice?
You definitely have to make some shapes as the Ice Queen! You have to practice what that looks like, hurling ice at people! There's an aspect of that. And trying to do it in a corset is another challenge. I've done my fair share of bonnets and crowns at this point!

Did you, Charlize and Jessica all gang up on Chris Hemsworth?
Chris will never work with women again after this experience – he was bullied!

Did you grow up on fairytales?
Oh, yeah, I loved all those fairytales and my Mum would read fairytales to us. I think fairytales are interesting because they've morphed into something a little lighter these days, as if we're scared of warning our children about the real terrors of life. I think that fairytales have been diluted.
James Mottram



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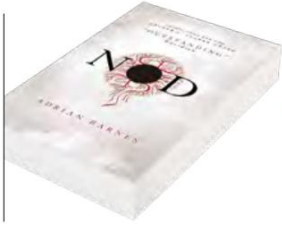
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DEADPOOL

Merc with a mouth goes meta

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

15 | 108 minutes

Director **Tim Miller**

Cast **Ryan Reynolds, Morena Baccarin, Ed Skrein, Stefan Kapicic, Gina Carano**

Captain America: Civil War may have the biggest cast, *X-Men: Apocalypse* the grander scale, but *Deadpool* will surely be the most argued-over superhero film this year. Long in and out of development hell, it finally arrives as an R-rated aberration in a sea of PG-13 spandex flicks. It's loud, obnoxious, defiantly puerile and mostly good fun.

Wade Wilson (Ryan Reynolds, in his second crack at the role following 2010's *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* – entirely ignored here) is a down-at-heel mercenary, working a string of minor jobs. When he meets Morena Baccarin's Vanessa, the pair embark on a whirlwind romance that's cut short when Wade is diagnosed with terminal cancer. Taking off on his own, he signs up for a mysterious treatment that offers to save his life and give him superpowers, but instead leaves him immortal, disfigured and insane. Cue a bloody revenge plot as Wade, now going by the name Deadpool, hunts down Ed Skrein's villainous Ajax – while making loads of knob gags!

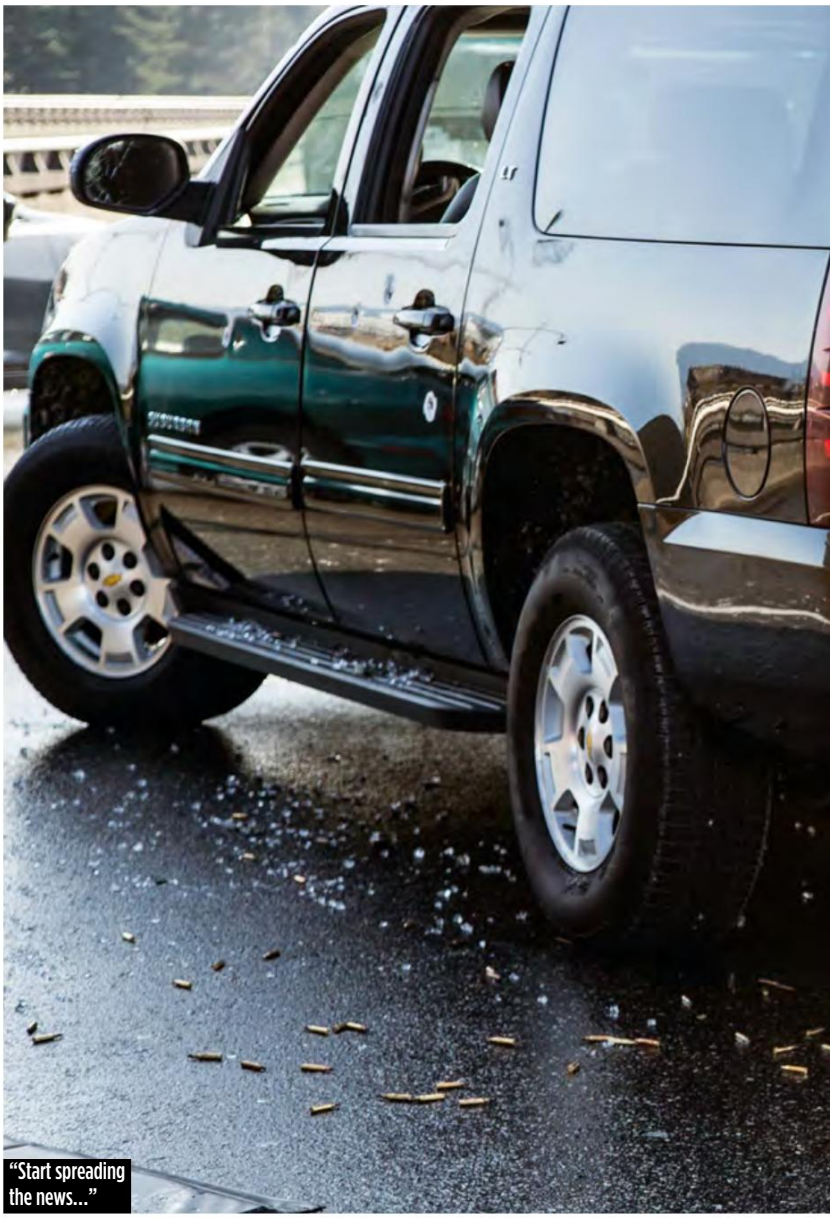
Deadpool starts strongly, waving its freak flag high. It's a rare film that can claim its opening credits as a comic highlight, but that's the case here, with the cast and crew names replaced with "a British villain", "moody teen" and, for director Tim Miller, "an overpaid tool". It's a strutting lead in to the opening, eye-poppingly violent tableau, and a hint at the film's central conceit: the main character knows that he's in a movie and frequently talks to the audience.

This could easily have come across as smug and annoying. Instead, the tone is generally well-judged throughout. Deadpool is a rubber-limbed cross between Spider-Man and Wolverine with a dash of the malevolent pranksterism of Michael Keaton's Betelgeuse, but he's not without empathy or moments of apparently sincere emotion. Reynolds is clearly having a blast in the role, both in and out of the mask.

The rest of the cast are solid too. Ed Skrein makes for a surprisingly grounded villain, while TJ Miller provides deadpan snark as Wade's bartender buddy. Baccarin is a little one-note, but that's down to thin material. Much better is Brianna Hildebrand as Negasonic Teenage Warhead – a sullen goth girl turned X-Man, whose dismissive retorts are some of the film's funniest moments.



The city's supply of black leather was getting dangerously low.



"Start spreading the news..."

Negasonic's not the only member of Marvel's mutants here. Indeed, it's slightly surprising just how closely *Deadpool* ties into Fox's wider filmic universe. Colossus (Stefan Kapicic voicing a hulking CG bruiser) is a major player throughout, and there are several sojourns to Xavier's mansion. That said, it misses the opportunity to really say anything *about* those films, other than bluntly pointing out that the studio couldn't afford cameos from any of the A-list X-guys, and Deadpool speculating over whether he'll meet "McAvoy or Stewart?". That's a bit of a missed opportunity. Indeed, for all its outrageous behaviour and fourth wall-breaking flourishes, this is actually a fairly conventional superhero origin tale.

> "*Deadpool* really isn't like any other superhero film"



More troubling are the moments when the film seems to forget its own joke. Despite a sharp line criticising, "what Limp Bizkit did to music in the '90s", *Deadpool* has a few scenes where it becomes the cinematic equivalent. An early, hyper-stylised "bullet countdown" sequence where Wade talks us through a series of kills is sub-Robert Rodriguez macho BS; there's a shoehorned-in visit to a strip club that instantly makes the whole thing feel more adolescent and blokey; and throughout there's a general over-reliance on slow-mo and bad hip-hop. You can practically hear the dude bro cheers in these moments and it's not a pleasant sound.

That said, *Deadpool* really isn't like any other superhero film. Its closest equivalent is probably Matthew Vaughn and Mark Millar's subversive *Kick-Ass*, but even that doesn't have quite the same unhinged lunacy. At their best, the violent scenes here have a cartoonish quality that's charming and silly – more *Itchy & Scratchy* than *The Punisher*. Likewise, the jokes come at you in relentless, pummelling bursts, with most of them striking home. And for once, the stakes remain defiantly low. The world isn't in danger here; this is purely a personal vendetta. That's refreshing. While the Marvel Studios movies maintain a consistency of tone that ensures quality but also a slight homogeneity, Fox's *Deadpool* makes for a pleasingly bizarre alternative.

Plus there's a bit where the hero gets a bullet shot up his butthole. Hur hur hur. **Will Salmon**

i *Deadpool* co-creator Rob Liefeld gets two nods: "Rob L" is written on a coffee cup and someone calls out "Liefeld!" in the bar.

MIND PROBE

TIM MILLER

Director of *Deadpool*



Was this film always going to have an R rating?
→ We did a PG-13 draft but we threw all that away. It was an attempt to get Fox to do the movie. Look, if you can do a PG-13 Wolverine movie you can do a PG-13 Deadpool movie. We would have just had a lot less fucks...

Do you see Deadpool as a superhero?
→ His motives are personal and not global or societal. And his methods are not socially acceptable by any stretch of the imagination! In many ways, to call him a superhero is a misnomer. He's more like a vigilante with a big chip on his shoulder. He wears a costume and there the similarity ends.

Can Deadpool fit into the wider X-Men universe?
→ It would be tricky for Fox because they have this brand that's very serious – how do you introduce Deadpool into that? But it's already been done. In the comics Deadpool has joined X-Force, which is kind of the black ops version of the X-Men. When they cross over, the X-Men go a little to the right, with a little darker tone, and Deadpool goes a little to the left, and actually joins a team even though he's the quintessential loner. **Nick Setchfield**

THE WITCH

It's in the trees, it's coming...

★★★★★

RELEASED 11 MARCH

15 | 93 minutes

Director **Robert Eggers**

Cast **Anya Taylor-Joy, Ralph Ineson, Kate Dickie, Harvey Scrimshaw**

The Witch arrives trailing its own folklore.

Unveiled at last year's Sundance Film Festival, this indie horror wowed and unnerved in equal measure, winning an award for first-time director Robert Eggers and stoking the kind of hardcore word-of-mouth no studio publicity campaign could fake. It was powerful and it was terrifying, the whispers assured us, like witchmark warnings scratched into a tree on the edge of the woods.

Such expectations can ultimately cripple a movie – hello, *The Blair Witch Project*, you overhyped, undervalued beauty – but for once the buzz is justified. Eggers has delivered a slow-burn masterpiece of rural dread, entwining the paranoia of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* with the deep, gnarly roots of European fairytale.

It's New England in the 17th century. Exiled to a remote farmhouse in the shadow of the wilderness, a devout family of Puritans experiences the disappearance of a baby son, abducted while in the care of eldest daughter Thomasin (a sincere, compelling performance by newcomer Anya Taylor-Joy, wide-eyed religious devotion colliding with burgeoning sexuality). Is the force ripping this Calvinist clan apart simply their own psychological faultlines, laid bare by the tragedy? Or does something authentically evil wait among the bare white pines?



Taylor-Joy: when your trousers fit perfectly.

Lit like a Dutch Master, it unfolds with a potent, chilling stillness. Eggers has a gift for restraint, finding incipient terror in something as simple as fading light or the sound of birdsong. Shots are routinely held just a frame too long for comfort. The film breathes, uneasily, forever on the edge of a scream.

Intelligent, provocative and immaculately assembled, as much a study of a disintegrating family as a riff on cultural archetypes of the feminine as a straight-ahead, knuckle-gnawing bone-freezer, *The Witch* restores the craft to big-screen witchcraft. Do go down to the woods today. **Nick Setchfield**

i Robert Eggers took inspiration from golden age fairytale illustrations, including the work of Arthur Rackham.


"Stop looking down my top!"

THE BOY

Boys will be toys

★★½☆☆

RELEASED 18 MARCH

15 | 97 minutes

Director **William Brent Bell**

Cast **Lauren Cohan, Rupert Evans, Jim Norton, Diana Hardcastle**

Creepy dolls are hardly an innovation for horror movies; they're so omnipresent that even *The Simpsons* spoofed the idea. So to pull off a solid entry in the canon, you've got to come up with something fresh. Director William Brent Bell, here making his best film of a so-far mixed career that has included *Stay Alive* and *The Devil Inside*, summons up a lot of atmosphere and keeps you guessing, but still doesn't completely make it work.

The Walking Dead's Lauren Cohan stars as an American woman who takes a job as a nanny in a creaky old English country house, only to discover that her charge will be a weird china doll, used as a kiddie replacement by grieving parents. Handed a list of rules about treating it as a real boy, she soon discovers the penalty for neglecting them – and there's nothing worse than being stuck in an isolated mansion with no mobile service and a freaky toy for company.

The initial feeling of isolating unease and growing paranoia works well, but it's undercut by a derivative third act and a forced subplot about our heroine fleeing an abusive relationship. And while Cohan copes admirably with frequently acting opposite an inanimate – OR IS HE? – prop, even she can't quite keep the whole affair afloat. **James White**

i The doll was used for prank scares by several of the cast, leading to one throwing it from their trailer in fright.

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"Shall we go and rip up some bin bags?"

ZOOTROPOLIS

Beasts Of One Nation

★★★★☆

RELEASED 25 MARCH

PG | 108 minutes

Directors **Byron Howard, Rich Moore**

Cast **Ginnifer Goodwin, Jason Bateman, Idris Elba, Jenny Slate**

Disney's tradition of cartoon anthropomorphism stretches back to Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. So there's something comfortingly circular about having another bunny – Judy Hopps (Ginnifer Goodwin), a rookie cop striving to make her mark – at the heart of its latest caper, even if it owes as much to DreamWorks and Aardman as *The Lion King* and *Robin Hood*.

The latter probably inspired the male lead, a wily fox (Jason Bateman) who joins forces with Judy to solve some mysterious disappearances. This takes them all over an impeccably realised alt-world encompassing bustling city, icy tundra and Amazonian rainforest, plus a miniature enclave for rodents that's the location for one of the film's most inventively action-packed set-pieces. That these include a chase reminiscent of *Speed* and an *Indiana Jones*-style rope bridge escape is testament to its ambition and relentless momentum. Indeed, it's so fast-paced there's barely time to register all the gags that pepper the screen.

The noir-ish plot's existential quandary (can predators and prey co-exist?) is the same one that motored *Madagascar*; this gives rise to scenes that might be a touch too intense for very young children. Overall, however, *Zootropolis* is a witty, creative and entertaining romp. **Neil Smith**

i *Zootropolis* isn't the first time we've seen foxy con artist Nick Wilde – he appeared on a billboard in *Big Hero 6*.

HIGH-RISE

Sick building syndrome

★★★½☆

RELEASED 18 MARCH

15 | 119 minutes

Director **Ben Wheatley**

Cast **Tom Hiddleston, Sienna Miller, Luke Evans, Elisabeth Moss**

Last time someone adapted a JG Ballard novel, it caused quite the furore: the *Evening Standard*'s critic labelled David Cronenberg's *Crash* "beyond depravity", and the *Daily Mail* called for a ban. While Ben Wheatley's take on a similar work is unlikely to provoke the same intensity of response (the fact it's a 15 certificate shows how far we've come...), it should inspire a fair few audience walkouts.

Borderline dystopian fantasy, Ballard's blackly comic 1975 fable of the fragility of civilisation is set in an apartment building whose well-heeled residents gradually, inexplicably, descend into sexual decadence and tribal violence. Like Cronenberg before him, Wheatley takes an appropriately detached, coolly Kubrickian approach. He's scrupulously faithful to the source – Ballardians will nod appreciatively on hearing some of the author's clinically crisp phrasing vocalised verbatim.

There's still room for invention, mind you. Within the beautifully stylised, strangely timeless vision of the '70s through which Tom Hiddleston's protagonist passes, Wheatley conjures resonant, borderline-surrealist images: fancy dress revellers in Regency finery; a murder viewed through a child's kaleidoscope. The soundtrack is impressively inventive too, encompassing krautrockers Can, a mordant Portishead cover of Abba's "SOS", and the deliciously ironic use of Shipping Forecast snooze-inducer "Sailing By".


Taking time to reflect.

But Ballard's novel presents challenges which are difficult for even the most talented filmmaker to overcome. Frankly, there's not much to it: over the course of 166 pages, a society slowly slides into dog-eating derangement, with no real rhyme or reason. It's difficult to spin tension or drama from that – or to make a story about the loss of affect itself affecting. This is compounded by the fact that the film takes about 20 minutes too long to make the descent. Arthouse audiences probably won't start ripping out seats and fornicating in the aisles after 45 minutes, but they might politely tut at their watches. **Ian Berriman**

i Both *Withnail & I*'s Bruce Robinson and *The Man Who Fell To Earth*'s Paul Mayersberg previously wrote *High-Rise* screenplays.



Weeping Angels rehearsals: mixed.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR

Temple Of Doom

★★★☆☆

RELEASED 18 MARCH
15 | **96 minutes**
Director **Johannes Roberts**
Cast **Sarah Wayne Callies, Jeremy Sisto, Javiet Botet, Sofia Rosinsky**

Sarah Wayne Callies isn't having much luck in the child-rearing stakes. Her *Walking Dead* character Lori died giving birth; here she plays Maria, an American living in India, whose son dies in a horrific car accident.

Overcome with grief, Maria's told of an ancient temple where the living can communicate with the dead. Warned not to let out any stray spirits, she predictably does, and from there, all manner of spooky and often grisly mayhem ensues.

TOSOTD is directed with verve by *Storage 24*'s Johannes Roberts, and Callies draws you in with her raw, emotionally charged performance. She has solid support from Jeremy Sisto in the role of Maria's feckless husband Michael, while Logan Creran and Sofia Rosinsky give affecting turns as her late son and daughter respectively.

It's hard not to feel that the so-called real-life ghost story of the actual haunted village of Bhangarh that inspired the film is more fascinating than the rather trad chiller that Roberts and co-writer Ernest Riera have come up with. Yet it makes for harrowing viewing that, though strangely familiar, will still linger in the memory.

Stephen Jewell

i Legend has it Bhangarh was cursed by a holy man after its palace was built up so it cast a shadow over his retreat.



Uneven sun tans: a real bummer.

KUNG FU PANDA 3

Another go for Po

★★★★☆

RELEASED 11 MARCH
PG | **95 minutes**
Directors **Jennifer Yuh Nelson, Alessandro Carloni**
Cast **Jack Black, JK Simmons, Bryan Cranston, Dustin Hoffman**

DreamWorks' chopsocky saga has always been a bit of an odd one: the ongoing tale of a morbidly obese panda who can drop-kick ninja rhinos but has trouble walking up the stairs. Luckily, three films in, it's still kicking the furry butt of most of the other 'toons around.

Mixing the training montages of the first film with the soul searching of the second, part three is pure *Star Wars*, with the titular Po learning to master the Force-like power of Ch'i and find out who his father really is before the new dark side baddie sucks him into the spirit realm with an army of jade zombies.

JK Simmons' gravel-voiced demon bull Kai and Bryan Cranston's bumbling fat-dad Li both threaten to steal the film, but it's still Jack Black's show – keeping up the knockout quips and making Po look as huggable as possible amid all the flying feet and fists; helping the series seem ever more heartfelt with age.

Animated with exceptional depth and beauty, it's given epic new heft by Hans Zimmer in the orchestra pit. It's a rare animated franchise that can grow up so quickly and still giggle at its own butt jokes.

Paul Bradshaw

i Four of Angelina Jolie's kids are extras in one scene; she says they now "think Mommy's job is ridiculously easy".



The Ewoks never stood a chance.

THE 5TH WAVE

Alien Nation

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
15 | **112 minutes**
Director **J Blakeson**
Cast **Chloë Grace Moretz, Maika Monroe, Liev Schreiber, Maria Bello**

"How do you rid the world of humans?" asks 16-year-old Cassie Sullivan (Chloë Grace Moretz), the every-teen heroine at the heart of this YA adap. It's a question that drives Rick Yancey's source novel.

An unseen alien race has begun an attack, sending tidal waves crashing into skyscrapers and causing a pandemic. The fourth wave will see them walk among us, taking our form, before the final push wipes the rest of us out.

Orphaned, Cassie must do what she can to survive, while looking for her brother, who's been shipped to a military compound to join other emo youngsters being trained to fight. Meanwhile, Cassie's getting hormonal after meeting Evan (Alex Roe); director J Blakeson knows his audience, with gratuitous shots of Roe cutting wood and bathing in a lake.

The story is efficient, with some decent twists – even if it feels *Ender's Game*-lite. And Blakeson does his best on a limited budget, though frequent shots of kids with military-grade weapons are an uncomfortable aspect of this adolescent actioner. **James Mottram**

i Filming in Macon, Georgia, a bus explosion damaged a bookstore, melting its modem and blowing a door off its hinges.

ALSO OUT

Three releases here that, at the time of going to press, had wriggled through our reviews net. **ALLEGIANT**, the third and penultimate part of the *Divergent* series, hits cinemas on 10 March. The following day sees the debut of top-secret *Cloverfield* "blood relative" **10 CLOVERFIELD LANE**.

Finally, two titans go *mano a mano* on 25 March, in **BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE**. Someone better have the Bat-plasters ready.



THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY PART 2

Snow is falling

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ★★★½☆

RELEASED 21 MARCH

2015 | 12 | Blu-ray 3D/Blu-ray Steelbook/ Blu-ray/DVD/download

Director **Francis Lawrence**

Cast **Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, Liam Hemsworth, Woody Harrelson, Donald Sutherland**

If ever there was a franchise to prove that YA stories shouldn't just be dismissed as kids' stuff, *The Hunger Games* is it. Within a poster-friendly package, the series deals with war, politics and morality, and pulls no punches along the way – life expectancy doesn't seem significantly higher in Panem than it does in Westeros. And in a time when the prevailing tone of blockbuster franchises veers towards lightness of touch and plenty of humour, *The Hunger Games* – the one that's supposedly, y'know, for kids – is the most serious of them all.

But that comes at a price, as this final instalment is almost oppressively dour. It's not just that people don't crack one-liners; they rarely even smile, such is the misery of their existence. Even the wedding celebration near the start is a strangely morose affair.

It's also incredibly talky, possibly a result of splitting Suzanne Collins's trilogy-closing *Mockingjay* novel in two. The jury's still very much out on that decision, as you often feel here that the story has been padded to justify the running time. With Katniss (Lawrence) and her band of allies spending much of the movie making their way through the Capitol for a final showdown with President Snow (Donald Sutherland), it basically boils down to extended passages of wandering through an apocalyptic landscape, punctuated by a few intense action sequences. If they'd compressed *Mockingjay 1*'s propaganda war and *Part 2*'s sightseeing into one movie, it's difficult to see what the story would have lost.

When they come, however, the setpieces are inventive and edge-of-the-seat exciting – particularly the one involving a torrent of boiling oil, and an *Aliens*-channelling escape from mutated "Mutts". The problem is that there simply aren't enough of them. When Finnick Odair declares, "Welcome to the 76th Hunger Games" he's teasing that the fights to the death which defined the franchise are about to be played out in the city, but that never quite comes to pass. In fact, the Games themselves – the franchise's big high-concept hook – are what the two *Mockingjay*

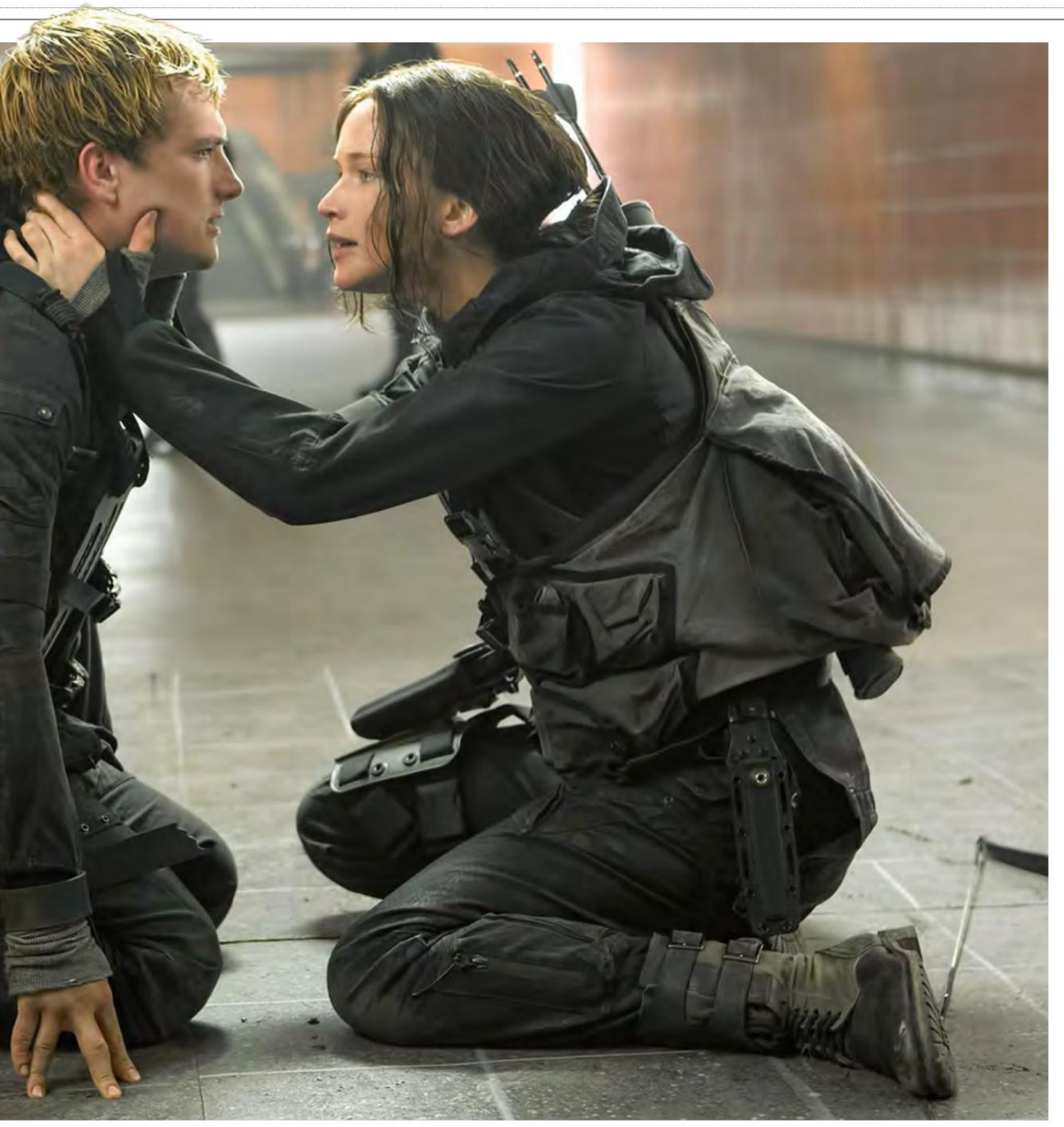


"Seriously. Where are you finding the time to dye your hair?"



"Did she not get the memo about the dress code?"

> "Inventive and edge-of-the-seat exciting"



films lack most. Is it really *The Hunger Games* without them?

Yet this final chapter of the saga still deserves your attention. The cast remain universally brilliant, from Lawrence's iconic reluctant hero Katniss (still endearingly difficult to warm to) to Sutherland, Julianne Moore and – in his final role – Philip Seymour Hoffman.

And for anyone who hasn't read the books, the closing act is full of genuine surprises, concluding the story in some unexpected but satisfying ways, while rewarding pretty much every character with a satisfying pay-off. Venturing into areas of shades-of-grey morality, the series eloquently makes the point that the world doesn't break down into good and evil, and that people you thought were good can do terrible things. That means it lingers in your brain longer than most popcorn fodder – as with much great science fiction, the mirror it holds up to the real world is a powerful weapon.

Extras The DVD is bare, but there's plenty on the Blu-ray: director Francis Lawrence and producer Nina Jacobson provide commentary; two-hour, eight-part Making Of "Pawns No More" covers all aspects of production, as well as asking the cast to reflect on the series; "The Hunger Games: A Photographic Journey" (10 minutes) walks us through on-set stills; "Panem On Display" (two minutes) takes look at the *Hunger Games* exhibition in San Francisco. Lenny Kravitz's stylist Cinna, "disappeared" in *Part 1*, is also miraculously resurrected for "Cinna's Sketchbook: Secrets Of The Mockingjay Armour" (nine minutes). **Richard Edwards**

i Buttercup the cat was originally black and white, but was recast as a ginger to match the description in the books.

THE WORKING DEAD

More posthumous genre performances

BRANDON LEE

The son of Bruce Lee was killed in an on-set gun accident during the filming of *The Crow*. The film was completed with the help of rewrites, stunt doubles and visual effects.



HEATH LEDGER

After Ledger's death from an accidental drug overdose, Terry Gilliam shared sections of his role in *The Imaginarium Of Doctor Parnassus* between Johnny Depp, Colin Farrell and Jude Law, with the character changing faces when he passed through a magic mirror.

AALIYAH

Although the star of *Queen Of The Damned* had completed filming when she died in a plane crash, some of her lines were inaudible. Her brother Rashad re-recorded the dialogue and their voices were composited together.

BELA LUGOSI

Determined not to waste footage of the horror icon after his death of a heart attack, *Plan 9 From Outer Space* director Ed Wood hired his wife's chiropractor to double for him, holding a Dracula-like cape in front of his face...



AMERICAN HORROR PROJECT Volume One

Carnivals, crazies and castration

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1973/1976 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD (dual format)

Directors **Christopher Speeth, Robert Allen Schnitzer, Matt Cimber**

Cast **Janine Carazo, Millie Perkins, Jerome Dempsey, Sharon Farrell**

Arrow Video's latest project showcases obscure, independent US horror. Volume one collects three offbeat, ambitious but flawed efforts which collectively have more in common with Federico Fellini than Freddy Krueger.

In the ham-fisted but woozily dream-like *Malatesta's Carnival Of Blood*, the new owners of an amusement park must fend off cannibalistic ghouls. Featuring rollercoaster decapitation, a glass-eyed killer caretaker and Hervé "Nick Nack" Villechaize, it's John Waters making *Spider Baby*, as dreamt by Agent Cooper. The plot's paper-thin and the editing's rotten, but the production design is quite something. In the secret world under the carnival there's real lo-fi, bad-trip ingenuity on display – like a VW Beetle turned into a reptilian head using plastic cups and orange bubble-wrap.

Also centred on a carnival, *The Premonition* sees a woman suffer visions when her adopted daughter is kidnapped by her insane birth mother. Serious-minded, it's drenched in lens flare, with a discordant piano score. The script was originally a non-genre piece, and it feels like that: the visions aren't that creepy or interesting. Banal rather than uncanny, it's no *Don't Look Now*. Highlight: B-movie icon Richard Lynch doing some random interpretative dance in a car park.

There's no broom-riding crone in *The Witch Who Came From The Sea*, just a female serial killer warped by childhood sexual abuse. Star Millie Perkins burns a hole in the screen with her crazy, but still engages your empathy. With its razorblade castrations, dialogue that'd make a docker blush, and unsettling incest flashbacks, it's undeniably powerful... but you couldn't exactly call it *enjoyable*.

Extras *Malatesta* has detailed film historian commentary; frank, fascinating interviews with the director, writer and art directors (36 minutes); and three minutes of cut cannibalistic feasting. *The Premonition* gets commentary by director Robert Allen Schnitzer, a new Making Of, and old interviews with Richard Lynch and Schnitzer – who's a tad pretentious, declaring that cinema should, "elevate the human spirit". More interesting is evidence of his student radical days: anti-Vietnam War TV ads, and a short (one of three) documenting a 1969 university occupation. *Witch*'s echoey audio track reunites the director, star and DoP; all three contribute to a new Making Of (23 minutes), bolstered by the Making Of (36 minutes) and director interview from a 2014 US release. Be aware: the print, though the best available, is in noticeably poor condition. **Ian Berriman**



Thursdays at the launderette were always interesting.

i The screams of the ghouls in *Malatesta's Carnival Of Blood* were made by slowing down the sound of squeaky dog toys.



Black Friday was getting ridiculous.

SCOUTS GUIDE TO THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE

American Die

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★★½☆☆

RELEASED 7 MARCH

2015 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD

Director **Christopher Landon**

Cast **Tye Sheridan, Logan Miller, Joey Morgan, Sarah Dumont**

Perhaps you haven't noticed, but there have been one or two films about zombie apocalypses in the last decade or so. Here's another, and its novelty is that it's kinda *American Pie*-ish, featuring horny male teens obsessed with spreading their oats in danger of becoming zombie nosh.

The lads in question are boy scouts whose plans to attend a teen party are scuppered by... guess what. They then join forces with a brassy stripper (Sarah Dumont) to splatter the undead over the sidewalks.

Scouts Guide is an odd little movie, a curious mix of sweetness, violent goriness and tasteless lasciviousness – one icky oral sex scene is a real low. There are no big laughs, but it does show a bit of invention (considering the tiredness of the genre) and should pass the time well enough if you've cans of lager and stuffed crust pizzas to hand. With a better soundtrack – most of the songs on it are a bit rubbish – it could have been a whole lot more fun.

Extras Featurettes on the make-up effects, zombie choreography and costume design, plus two deleted scenes. **Russell Lewin**

i Formed in 1910, the Boy Scouts of America has served more than 114 million youths; 181 became astronauts.



She'd only asked Dad for a picture hook.

PARANORMAL ACTIVITY: THE GHOST DIMENSION

The Last Exorcism

★★☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2015 | 15 | 3D Blu-ray/Blu-ray/DVD/download

Director **Gregory Plotkin**

Cast **Chris J Murray, Brit Shaw, Dan Gill, Ivy George, Mark Steger**

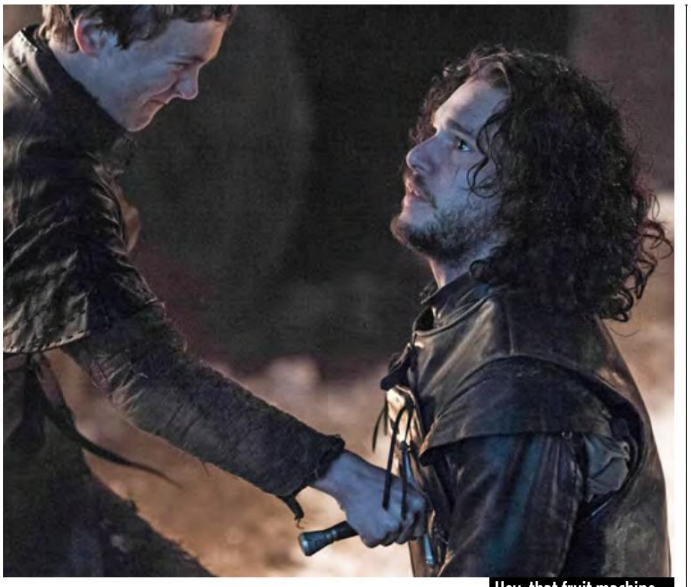
Slap a different title on this and it'd be just another entertaining, if generic, creepshow. But as the last ever *Paranormal Activity* film, it has to be more than just spooky – it has to provide closure, tying up the loose ends of an increasingly slapdash franchise. Unsurprisingly, it fails miserably.

Ghost Dimension's best idea is the ghost-cam, a bizarre invention that makes the demonic "Toby" visible at last. Getting to watch the entity behind all those slammed doors as he grows in power is legitimately scary, though it's probably not worth shelling out for the version in 3D (this entry's main innovation). And giving the ghost-cam to a new set of victims, completely unconnected to the family in the other films, is a mistake; it didn't work in the fourth film, and it doesn't work here.

Watch it for the jump scares, if you must; there are a couple of good ones. But don't expect a proper ending to the franchise – all this film does is underline just how pointless every *Paranormal Activity* sequel was.

Extras Nine deleted scenes (20 minutes). **Sarah Dobbs**

This is the only *PA* film that doesn't even include a cameo by Katie Featherston. Maybe she was washing her hair.



Hey, that fruit machine looks just like Jon Snow!

GAME OF THRONES Season Five

In The Bleak Mud Winter

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ★★★★★

RELEASED 14 MARCH

2015 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD

Creators **David Benioff, DB Weiss**

Cast **Peter Dinklage, Emilia Clarke, Lena Headey, Kit Harington**

It's all sunshine, lollipops and rainbows in the fifth season of HBO's epic take on George RR Martin's novels... Just kidding – this year is every bit as bleak and harrowing as what's come before. Arguably more so, as last year's hints that the tide might be about to turn for the good guys are quickly stamped down under lots of mud and snow. That lack of hope is starting to feel relentless – in fact, some of the more brutal scenes (rape, burning a child at the stake) leave you wondering whether they're there because someone felt they were dramatic, or simply for shock value.

However, though this isn't a vintage season, *Game Of Thrones* remains one of the most compelling shows around. Sequences like the White Walkers' assault on Hardhome are among the most ambitious ever portrayed on telly, and even if the plot sometimes feels a bit *too* sprawling and complex, it still has the capacity to wrongfoot you. As it does with *that* cliffhanger ending – we know nothing, Jon Snow.

Extras A refreshingly busy DVD comes with 12 cast/crew commentaries, four deleted scenes, and some decent featurettes: "Anatomy Of An Episode: Mother's Mercy" (30 minutes) takes an in-depth look at the season finale; "The Real History Behind *Game Of Thrones*" (40 minutes) shows how the Wars of the Roses and other bits of history inspired the saga; "A Day In The Life" (26 minutes) goes behind the scenes; and "New Characters/New Locations" (8 minutes), er, has a very accurate title. The Blu-ray adds an in-episode pop-up guide, plus loads of extra Westeros backstory – fan nirvana. **Richard Edwards**

A body double filled in for Lena Headey in much of Cersei's naked "Walk of Shame" through King's Landing.



Harry's new "person plant" was ace.

EVANGELION 3.33

Return of the wuss

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2012 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD

Director **Hideaki Anno**

Cast **Megumi Ogata, Akira Ishida, Yuko Miyamura, Megumi Hayashibara**

Anime fans have waited a long time for this new cinematic iteration of *Evangelion*. Originating in the '90s, *Eva* is kind of *Pacific Rim* meets *Watchmen*, with giant robots and manically neurotic characters. Newbies certainly shouldn't start here – the two earlier films rebooted the story.

This time round, the long-suffering Shinji awakes 14 years after the last episode, to find his former friends hating him – not surprising, as he appears to have reduced the world to a crimson ruin. After witnessing warfare on a flying battleship, Shinji is "rescued" by his supremely sinister father, then introduced to a youth who seems mysteriously in love with him. *Eva* fans will recognise this stranger as Kaworu, a pivotal figure in the franchise.

After the massively exuberant *Evangelion 2.22*, this sequel is jarringly downbeat. It may also annoy viewers sick of Shinji being whiny, miserable and hopeless (his default setting for much of *Eva*), and for the lack of answers to plot mysteries (which is, again, typical). Yet it's sumptuously made and works well as a traumatic head-trip through the ruins of a psyche that was broken from the start.

Extras Brief promo material. **Andrew Osmond**

Anno isn't hurrying to make the fourth film – he's now co-directing the next Japanese Godzilla film instead.



Ade didn't react well to the review.

BACKTRACK

Shrinking interest rate

★★☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★★½☆☆

RELEASED 14 MARCH
2015 | 15 | DVD
Director **Michael Petroni**
Cast **Adrien Brody, Sam Neill, Robin McLeavy, Chloe Bayliss**

Even ghosts need psychiatric help in this strikingly miserable, Australian-made supernatural drama. Adrien Brody stars as Peter Bower, a psychoanalyst who's suffering more than most of his patients thanks to the untimely death of his young daughter. When a mute teenager turns up at his office for analysis, he starts trying to work out what's wrong with her – but then his friend Duncan (a beardy Sam Neill) points out that she's probably just an aged-up version of his dead kid. Cue lots of wide-eyed despair faces as Peter battles to figure out whether he's losing his mind or if there's really a ghost trying to give him a message.

It's not the most enticing premise, and Peter isn't the most sympathetic of leads, especially as the film delves into his past misdemeanours. In terms of ghouls, it's a quantity over quality deal; there are loads of them, but only the most easily startled viewers will find them scary.

The only decent thing about this film is Sam Neill. If only all half-baked horror movies could wheel him out to explain the plot to their dull-witted protagonists.

Extras Director's commentary; deleted scenes; Making Of. **Sarah Dobbs**

i Writer/director Michael Petroni also co-wrote *Queen Of The Damned* and *The Voyage Of The Dawn Treader*.



Frank enjoyed his brisk walks through Hell.

THE LAST WITCH HUNTER

Coven ready turkey

★★☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★★½☆☆

RELEASED 7 MARCH
2015 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD/download
Director **Breck Eisner**
Cast **Vin Diesel, Rose Leslie, Elijah Wood, Michael Caine**

Some actors can raise the quality of a dud film simply by appearing in it. Michael Caine is not one of them. Brilliant though he can be, if he doesn't *have* to be, he doesn't bother. In the '70s and early '80s his performance was often a barometer of quality – the crapper the movie, the less effort he put it. In *The Swarm* he could have been replaced by a Michael Caine standee.

Recently, this hasn't been an issue, as he's been offered better parts. But thanks to Vin Diesel insisting that his "buddy" (they know each other from "parties", we're told in the commentary) must have a role in his new fantasy flick, Caine's past has caught up with him.

The Last Witch Hunter starts off looking entertainingly bad before becoming simply tediously bad. The story of an immortal Witch Hunter (Diesel in world-weary mode... which isn't that much different from Diesel in any other mode) whose ancient enemy is attempting a rebirth in modern Manhattan, it's sloppy, derivative, and flair-free, beset with cartoony CG, ADHD pacing and quips that pass for dialogue.

Caine plays a mentor figure who's being replaced by a younger model (Elijah Wood). It's his laziest performance in years – and not just because he spends most of the film in a coma. That must rate as his ultimate critique of a film's worth.

Extras A dry commentary by director Breck Eisner; a workmanlike 29-minute Making Of; two deleted scenes (five minutes); four cartoon shorts in differing animation styles (2-3 minutes each); a sizzle reel (one-and-a-half minutes of clips, basically). **Dave Golder**

i Michael Caine was replaced by a full-sized replica of the actor for the scenes where his character was in a coma.



Autocorrect: can be an absolute arse.

MIRAI NIKKI: FUTURE DIARY

Part One

Spoilers!

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ☆☆☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
2011-2012 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD
Director **Naoto Hosoda**
Cast **Misuzu Togashi, Mai Aizawa, Norio Wakamoto, Tomosa Murata**

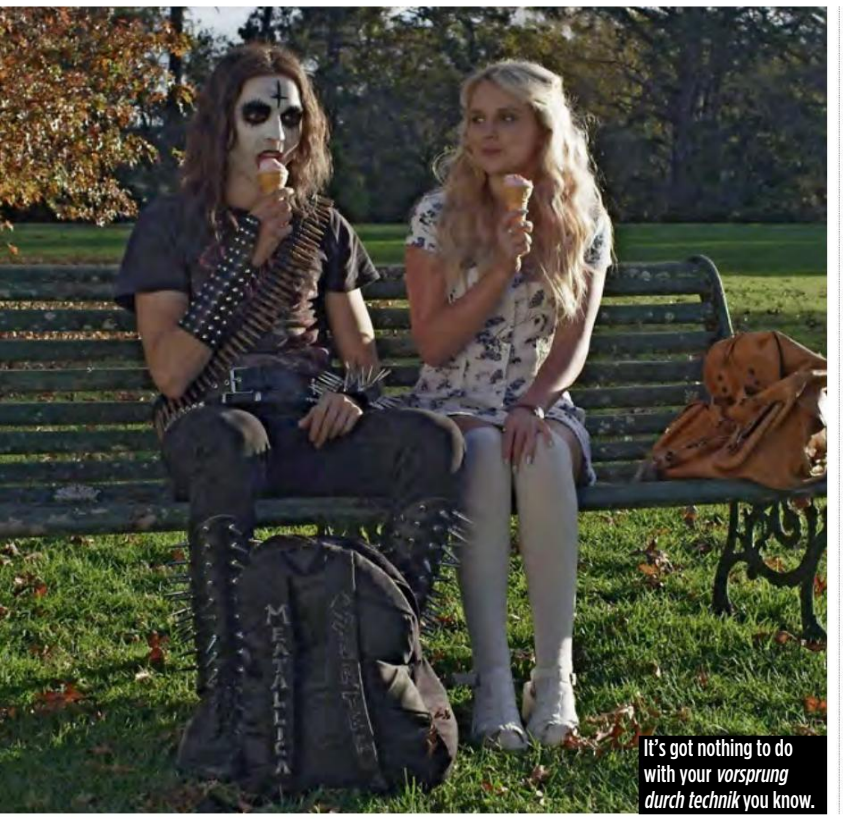
After some strong horror anime recently – *Attack On Titan*, *Tokyo Ghoul* – it's time for some schlock to balance them out. Step forward *Mirai Nikki*, whose interesting first episode makes the show briefly look like another *Death Note*, before it goes bloodily bananas.

Yuki, a withdrawn Japanese schoolboy, keeps a diary of his daily life on his mobile, and confides in his imaginary friend, a god. However, the god is actually real, and starts sending Yuki phone entries from the future; they allow Yuki to dodge a serial killer, for example. The bad news: the god is also sending messages to 11 other people, and he wants them all (including Yuki) to kill each other. Last one standing will take the god's place.

So far, so intriguing. Then it goes berserk, with mad school bombers, perverted death cults, punctured eyeballs and plenty of crazy cute girls. A lot of it's just stupid, but at times it's genuinely funny – especially when the show brings in Yuki's broadminded mum and a killer toddler. Sure, it lives down to anime's worst stereotypes, yet it's often guilty, gory fun.

Extras None. **Andrew Osmond**

i Death Notes – books which "let you kill people" by writing their names – were banned for real in some Chinese cities.



It's got nothing to do with your *vorsprung durch technik* you know.

DEATHGASM

Death and axes

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ☆☆☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2015 | 15 | Blu-ray (Zavvi exclusive)/DVD

Director **Jason Lei Howden**

Cast **Milo Cawthorne, James Blake, Kimberley Crossman, Sam Berkley**

Early on in this Kiwi horror, its guitar-playing hero describes ushering in the end of the world by turning demonic sheet music into heavy metal as "the biggest dick move ever" – but there's competition in that category. In one scene, he takes on a horde of the demonically possessed by swinging around a prodigiously-sized, wobbly black dildo.

Not a film to watch with your nan, then – but it's far more charming than you might expect. An unashamed throwback to horror-comedy's gory glory days of the '80s, it combines its cartoon violence (highlight: a mechanic having an engine dropped on their head) with an impressive array of witty one-liners (of a bully: "He's hospitalised more nerds than asthma"), total mastery of the sight gag (a metalhead is syphoning petrol; the camera pulls back to reveal he's robbing it from an ambulance), and a surprising amount of heart.

Okay, it ain't exactly original (*Evil Dead* is at least 60% of the recipe) or intellectually challenging, and there's something of a second-act slump, but debutant director Jason Lei Howden attacks his "What if metal really *was* evil?" premise with such brio that even a be-sandalled folkie may find themselves throwing some devil horns.

Extras None. **Ian Berriman**

i The film was funded using the $200,000 prize money for New Zealand filmmaking competition Make My Horror Movie.


"Any spare change, guv?"

FRANKENSTEIN

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ☆☆☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2015 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD

Mystifyingly, this modern-day *Frankenstein* has a misleading gothic cover that makes it look like a cash-in on the appalling *I, Frankenstein*. Bad move. This is *much* better.

Written and directed by *Candyman*'s Bernard Rose, it's a grim, bloody *Modern Prometheus* told from the monster's point of view. A tad unsubtle and rambling at times (how apt), it nevertheless boasts great performances (including Carrie-Anne Moss as one of the monster's creators) and effective horror moments.

Extras None. **Dave Golder**


No man, it's in the other direction!

ALIENATE

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★☆☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2016 | 15 | DVD

After a strong opening scene, this low-key invasion flick settles into a languid pace. Set both before and after a global attack by a nasty bunch of laser-wielding extraterrestrials, it's more concerned with the relationship breakdown that separated David (Blake Webb) and his wife than the monsters.

The direction is solid, the acting good and the effects sequences sparingly deployed, but you can't help but wish there'd just been one or two more aliens to liven things up.

Extras A trailer. **Will Salmon**


The bouncy castle was about to inflate.

THE ATOMIC SUBMARINE

★★☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★☆☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1959 | PG | DVD

When ships disappear in waters near the North Pole, nuclear sub the Tigershark hunts for an aggressor. Could it be an alien intelligence? You wouldn't guess so from the first hour of chap chat by military types in corners of studios, but it eventually turns out to be.

Steered by a stern voiceover, this is a somewhat grey underwater drama, complete with dodgy model work and stock footage, and it's probably only for fervent fans of '50 sci-fi.

Extras Trailer. **Russell Lewin**


South Shields: nice at this time of year.

ARROWHEAD

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2016 | 15 | DVD/VOD

You'd have thought low-budget "stranded-on-an-alien-planet" sci-fi has nothing new to offer – there's only so much you can do with a desert and a survival-against-local-nastiness scenario. But Aussie director Jesse O'Brien gives it a good try.

His ambitions may outstrip his budget, but for the most part *Arrowhead* is a well-made SF mystery about a man who's changing into... what exactly? Surprisingly it isn't incredibly grim either; there's room for wit and an amusing AI too.

Extras A behind-the-scenes piece. **Dave Golder**



Last night's curry was not looking appealing.

THE VISIT

Contact has been made

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ☆☆☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2015 | PG | DVD

Director **Michael Madsen**

Cast **N/A**

No, nothing to do with the recent M Night Shyamalan movie (as a subtitle – *An Alien Encounter* – helpfully underlines). And it's not the improbable vision of a former Reservoir Dog, either – this Michael Madsen is a high-minded Danish director.

It is, in fact, a semi-fictionalised documentary that tussles with two of the mightiest questions we face as a race. What if we're not alone in the universe? And, more crucially: what if they know where we live?

Madsen's enlisted a legion of experts – psychologists, astro-biologists, theologians, lawyers – to ponder the implications of first contact with an extra-terrestrial civilisation. We watch as government officials fret over the right words to reassure the public – "We believe no one is in imminent danger" is their most optimistic draft – while a boffin dons a bio-hazard suit to enter an alien craft. Elsewhere there are odd Kubrickian interludes where the camera glides through elegant, empty rooms, like the one Dave Bowman enters at the end of *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

It's a provocative, artfully assembled but ultimately inconclusive thought experiment that could have done with some input from the general public – the ones who may just be stampeding in panic from the heat ray...

Extras None. **Nick Setchfield**

i Turns out the United Nations has an Office For Outer Space Affairs, which is a cheering thought, isn't it?

PETER AND WENDY

Might just Hook you

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

RELEASED 21 MARCH

2015 | PG | DVD/download

Director **Diarmuid Lawrence**

Cast **Stanley Tucci, Hazel Doupe, Laura Fraser, Rasmus Hardiker**

"Tinker Bell's such a total *bitch*," says one of the kids in this modern-day update of JM Barrie's classic tale. It's just one example of how the makers of this adaptation, which aired on ITV on Boxing Day, wanted it to feel as "now" as possible – alongside casting Paloma Faith as Tinker Bell,

> "Boy, does Stanley Tucci have fun as Hook"

ensuring Peter Pan looks as though he's auditioning for a teenage boyband, and having a character compare Captain Hook to Captain Jack Sparrow. The weird thing is... it actually works.

The film's set inside Great Ormond Street Hospital – the organisation Barrie left the rights of his most famous book to – and the poorly children contained in one ward end up being the stars of a trip to Neverland, as Lucy (Hazel Doupe), a girl about to have heart surgery, reads the book aloud to her fellow patients before taking on the role of Wendy in the story.

The kids aren't bad actors, the dialogue flows naturally, the hospital setting is poignant, and the presence of Stanley Tucci as the bigwig surgeon about to save Lucy's life adds star power. And then Tucci dons a real big wig to play Hook in the alternate version of the tale and boy, does he have fun. Which means we do, too.


Trouble is, their favourite bar had a "no hats" policy.

Sure, it drags a little in the middle. Tiger Lily seems like an afterthought – although she always did. The music is so generic you can almost hum it before you hear it. And Peter himself isn't that interesting. However, Doupe does a cracking job in both her roles – and the way the film blends a real-life modern hospital with Neverland is often ingenious. *Pan* might have had all the Hollywood bucks splashed on it, but *Peter And Wendy* has all the heart.

Extras A brief Making Of and "Learning To Fly" featurette (10 minutes). **Jayne Nelson**

i The first person to play the role of Peter Pan was actress Nina Boucicault, in a 1904 stage production. She was 37 at the time!



New hairdresser Jan had a shaky start.

TALES THAT WITNESS MADNESS

Ménage à tree

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ☆☆☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1973 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD

Director **Freddie Francis**

Cast **Donald Pleasence, Peter McEnery, Joan Collins, Kim Novak**

This gruesome British horror is one of the last anthology films from the late '60s/early '70s to get a UK DVD release. You can see why. Firstly, it's not from anthology specialists Amicus; secondly, it's not an outstanding example. It does have its moments, though.

The first segment, about a young boy whose imaginary friend is a tiger, is rather weak. And the final entry, concerning a plot to sacrifice a virgin (Mary Tamm, later *Doctor Who* companion Romana) in a Hawaiian ritual, takes forever to get to its queasy cannibalistic conclusion and is sorely missing a twist in the tale.

Sandwiched in-between, however, are two instalments so mindbogglingly barking that they're hugely entertaining. One concerns a haunted, time-travelling penny farthing. The other sees a husband arousing his wife's jealousy when he becomes obsessed with a curiously curvaceous tree stump – and is every bit as weirdly perverse as that sounds.

Shame about the framing story – Donald Pleasence as a psychiatrist introducing his patients. It's too similar to that of 1972 anthology *Asylum* – and not nearly as effective.

Extras None. **Ian Berriman**

i Writer Jennifer Jayne appeared in an anthology horror, *Dr Terror's House Of Horrors*, in 1965 – as a vampire.



Stephen could never get as excited about manholes as his mates did.

YOU, ME AND THE APOCALYPSE

Situation comet-y

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ★★½☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2015 | 15 | DVD

Creator **Iain Hollands**

Cast **Mathew Baynton, Joel Fry, Pauline Quirke, Jenna Fischer**

What would you do if there were only 34 days to the end of the world? Once you'd looted a new TV, had sex in the street and punched your boss in the face, you could do worse than binge-watch this 10-part Sky 1 show.

Like star Mathew Baynton's previous series *The Wrong Mans*, it weds comedy with a thriller format. Baynton plays Slough bank manager Jamie, for whom an impending comet strike is only the tip of the bad news iceberg; for starters, his wife, missing for seven years, appears to be hooked up with an evil twin he never knew he had...

The opening of every episode shows us where it will all end – in a bunker as the comet strikes – which does undercut some of the tension. Strong supporting characters compensate, though: white supremacist escaped prisoner Leanne (Megan Mullaly) is the standout, while Rob Lowe amuses as a potty-mouthed priest whose job is debunking messiahs.

The series does rather hammer the same buttons repeatedly – after a while, it starts to feel like Jamie discovers a new relative every 20 minutes. Some of the humour – like a suppository insertion scene – is a little crass. And the show's globe-hopping between Slough, Washington and the Vatican often doesn't convince (some of the US accents are pretty ropey). But the manner in which it switches between comedy, action and pathos works surprisingly well, as does the way it regularly delivers gobsmacking twists – right up until the final shot.

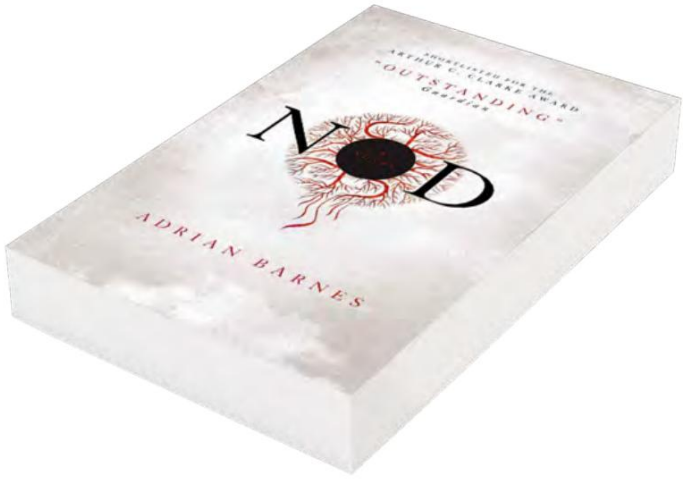
Extras A 23-minute behind-the-scenes piece; six short featurettes (23 minutes). **Ian Berriman**

i To prepare for his role as Father Jude, Rob Lowe properly read the Bible from cover to cover for the first time.

(ROUND UP)



We really wanted to cover **DOCTOR WHO** SERIES NINE (9 March, Blu-ray/DVD) this issue, but as discs weren't made available in time we've decided to do it next time so we can look at the extras in detail. There are quite a few too, including commentaries on four episodes, deleted scenes, and a piece following how writer Sarah Dollard penned "Trap Street". After a decade of demon-hunting, the Winchester Brothers are still going strong, and **SUPERNATURAL** SEASON TEN (21 March, Blu-ray/DVD) continues to deliver an array of spooky thrills, although – as seems to be more the case as the years roll by – there are some right old duffers tucked in among the gems. This year we'd recommend you skip the dire werewolf-o-rama "Paper Moon". That's made up for, though, by 200th episode "Fan Fiction", which may inspire a bit of a fond chin-wobble. Finally, **FRIGHTFEST PRESENTS WAVE 2** (out now/7 March/14 March, VOD) sees the horror festival providing a digital showcase for another six features. Pick of the bunch (and also one of just two which is "our" kind of fantastical horror) is the oddball, Lovecraftian *Curtain*, in which a nurse discovers a portal to another dimension behind her bathroom wall after several shower curtains disappear! Reminiscent of '80s horror, it mixes horror and comedy rather well and features some decent monster effects. Visit www.frightfestpresents.com for more details on this and the other titles in the slate: *Emelie*, *Landmine Goes Click*, *Last Girl Standing*, *The Lesson* and *The Unfolding*.



NOD

Sleepless Near Seattle

★★★★☆

RELEASED 4 MARCH
261 pages | Paperback/ebook
Author **Adrian Barnes**
Publisher **Titan Books**

Is there a crisis around sleep at the moment? *Nod* was first published back in 2012 through a small press called Bluemoose, but even then it wasn't the first novel of this decade to depict a dystopian world beset by widespread, life-threatening insomnia. This is also the premise of *Sleepless* by Charlie Huston (2010), *Black Moon* by Kenneth Calhoun (2012) and *Sleep Donation* by Karen Russell (2014). Our social anxieties tend to bubble up through SF – so in our increasingly 24/7, always-switched-on world, are we telling ourselves we need more downtime?

Nod, Adrian Barnes's debut novel – shortlisted for the Clarke Award and now enjoying a wider release through Titan Books – never explains why, one day, almost everyone in the world stops sleeping. There are no teams of fretful scientists looking for a cure – or if there are, they're doing it elsewhere. Instead we focus on our narrator Paul, one of the few still able to sleep, who lives in Vancouver, writes books about etymology and would be the first to admit he's not the most useful person to have fully functional in the midst of a total societal breakdown.

Things fall apart with terrifying speed. All power is shut off in an effort to reverse the plague of wakefulness. The state of panic is exacerbated by everyone becoming too tired to think rationally, and within a week psychosis is setting in. Within a month, everyone unable to sleep will be dead. The remaining "sleepers" – many of them children – are treated first with jealousy, then suspicion, then aggression. Weird new social groups form, including one led by a man named Charles, who was unbalanced to begin with and now believes the manuscript of Paul's next book holds the key to this new world, which he calls Nod.

> "Drags the reader along with its pessimistic worldview"

In its depiction of a sophisticated society rapidly reverting into a feral state, *Nod* strongly recalls JG Ballard's *High-Rise* – and its brevity harks refreshingly back to an era where SF novels tended not to be epic, plotty doorstops, but concise novels of ideas. It explores its concept from several angles, gives us a character story to make us care, and then vacates the stage. Frankly, if it went on any longer it might be unbearable. The end of the world as viewed by a self-confessed misanthrope makes for a bleak and often depressing novel, with violence that some may find hard to stomach, and there isn't even much in the way of gallows humour to offer relief.

Ultimately the novel isn't really about sleep, or why we need it, or why we shouldn't take it for granted. The insomnia is merely an apt way of showing us that society itself is the dream, as Paul explicitly states at one point. We think of our world as something solid, when really it exists in our minds. Staying awake means we go mad, our world collapses and we die. The choice of an etymologist as narrator underlines how our dream-world is made not of physical things but words, agreements that we will do this and not that. The longer the insomnia crisis goes on, the more incoherent everyone becomes and the less any of it means.

Nod is very well written – appropriately, given the nature of its narrator, it has a clarity that renders it vivid throughout – and it's a clever, thoughtful and thought-provoking novel. However, it's easier to admire than to enjoy, unless you delight in watching the grim collapse of civilisation (and granted, some people do). At times it lays it on rather thick, dragging the reader along with its deeply pessimistic worldview. But it's undoubtedly powerful, and has a great deal to say. **Eddie Robson**

i Since finishing this novel, Barnes has been diagnosed with a brain tumour, which has sadly taken away his ability to write.



ON THE EDGE OF GONE

SFX Loves

Comet catastrophe

★★★★★

RELEASED 8 MARCH
464 pages | Hardback
Author **Corinne Duyvis**
Publisher **Amulet Books**

You're an autistic Dutch teenager with a drug-addicted mother. You discover that a comet is going to crash into the Earth – probably somewhere in Eastern Europe, nobody knows for sure – and there's a good chance that nothing will survive. You don't win any of the lotteries to leave Earth on a generational spaceship, and as the comet's collision looms and you're supposed to be setting off for the bunker that's been assigned to you, your beloved sister is nowhere to be seen. Stressful? You don't know the half of it...

One good thing about *On The Edge Of Gone* is that somehow this apocalyptic story is told without the misery and despair you'd expect – although it's hardly light reading. However, the *glorious* thing is that its star, Denise, seems so real and behaves so convincingly that she sells absolutely everything else in the book, from her wanderings around the destroyed city of Amsterdam to a deadly mega-tsunami. Being autistic (her creator Corinne Duyvis is, too), sometimes all she wants is to put her head on a pillowcase nobody else has touched. You believe in her, and therefore you believe in her ruined world. Utterly superb. **Jayne Nelson**

i Duyvis is the co-founder of www.disabilityinkidlit.com, a website about disability in children's books.



THE COLD BETWEEN

Make love not war

★★★★☆

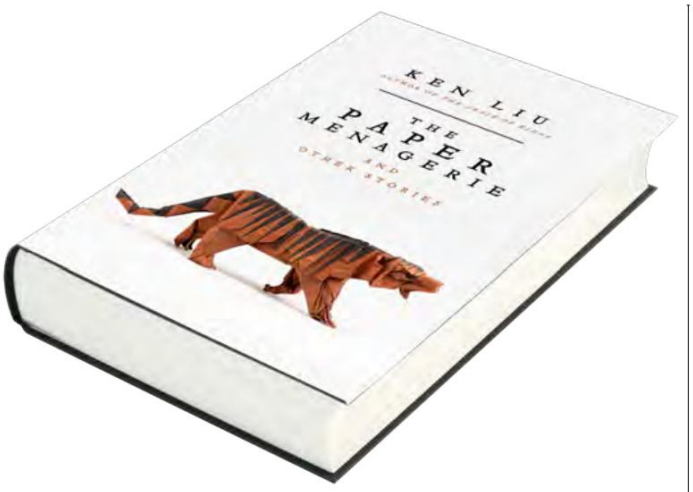
RELEASED 10 MARCH
400 pages | Paperback/ebook
Author **Elizabeth Bonesteel**
Publisher **Harper Voyager**

This debut novel starts with girl-meets-boy – or rather, seasoned woman meets seasoned man on a space colony. Frisky sex follows (fully but not eye-wateringly described), but soon after the man is accused of killing the woman's ex. Worse, the lovers come from two very different interstellar human cultures, which may be about to go to war...

That beginning may make readers fear this is a genre romance in space-opera clothing. But it becomes a highly enjoyable read, with meaty punch-ups, adult emotions and assertive feminine characters. The murder mystery becomes a conspiracy thriller, then heads out into space for the revelations. These are the least satisfying parts of the book, especially when it comes to a universe-defining decision which a character makes in barely the space of a paragraph.

In fairness, this part of the story may be explored more in the forthcoming sequels; there isn't a cliffhanger, mind, and the book satisfies as a standalone. What's really impressive about *The Cold Between*, though, is that the characters' pasts are sketched so well that it already feels like it's part of an established series. **Andrew Osmond**

i Elizabeth Bonesteel once ducked out of *Alien* ("I couldn't take it") and "cried like a baby" at *The Wrath Of Khan*.



THE PAPER MENAGERIE

Folding Tigers, Hidden Foxes

★★★½☆

RELEASED 10 MARCH
450 pages | Hardback/ebook
Author **Ken Liu**
Publisher **Head Of Zeus**

It's perhaps unfair to introduce a novelist and short story writer via his work as a translator, but thus far many will know the name of Ken Liu via his association with Hugo-winning Chinese writer Liu Cixin. However, this is beginning to change: Liu's fantasy novel *The Grace Of Kings* was name-checked by, among others, Hugh Howey.

Now we have this selection of 15 short stories selected by the writer himself, and named after a Hugo, Nebula and World Fantasy Award-winning tale of eldritch origami practice. They're stories that represent, according to the preface, "a good, representative sample of interests, obsessions, and creative goals". At the broadest level, they fit into two types (although there's much overlap): more experimental short fiction that's lyrical and, if you were being critical, tends towards whimsy; and more plot-driven and direct stories.

The former may sometimes test your patience. The first entry in the collection, "The Bookmaking Habits Of Select Species", for example, is a riff on the notion that "everyone makes books" – and by "everyone", Liu means different species. It's a neat idea, but you may find yourself wondering if Liu has typed up some notes he'd made for an as yet unwritten novel.

Liu's far better when he grapples with plot and genre. "The Regular", for instance, is a cyberpunk-tinged noir about a gumshoe detective investigating the murder of a sex worker. "Good Hunting", meanwhile, draws on the Chinese mythology around fox spirits to explore how technological change affects societies.

In terms of themes, colonialism, politics, the power of the written word and family recur, while many of the stories appear to draw on cutting-edge research. Despite this thematic consistency, it's an uneven collection – but when he's good, Liu is very, very, very good indeed. **Jonathan Wright**

i Should you fancy a taster of Liu's work, the awards-hoovering titular story can be read online here: http://bit.ly/papermen.



EMPIRE V

Slipping the Tongue

★★★½☆

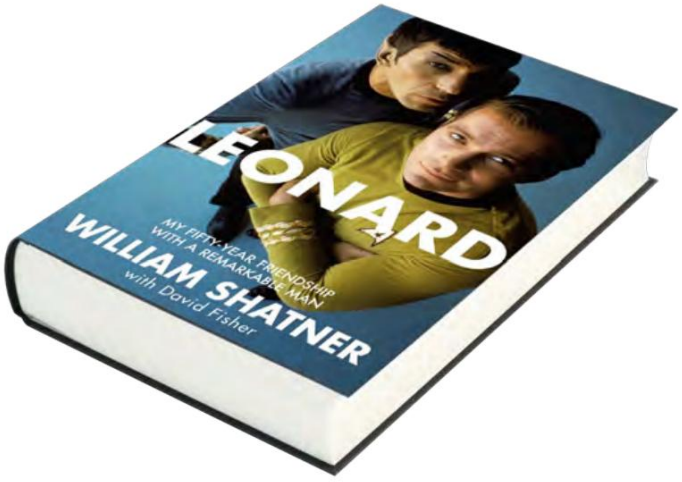
RELEASED OUT NOW!
387 pages | Hardcover/ebook
Author **Victor Pelevin**
Publisher **Gollancz**

***Empire V* (subtitle: *The Prince Of Hamlet*)** is a kind of vampire novel, but only debatably so. In fact, it's debatable if it's even a novel, as much of it reads like a series of socio-philosophical lectures; erudite, ironic, lucid and witty, but still lectures.

It starts with the first-person protagonist, a young Russian man called Roman, being lured astray by a stranger and vampirised, which involves him receiving an ancient oral parasite called the Tongue. (Trekkers may be reminded of symbiont aliens the Trill.) Roman is then taught about our world's reality, where everyone is born a pod-person, a robot of "civilisation", with no Neo to free us from this Matrix.

There's very little story as such, even when Roman is smitten by a female trainee vampire. There are some excellent comic vignettes and fine images, such as vampires decanting the memories and experiences of their human livestock, and the conceptual beauty of the revealed world will have some readers purring with pleasure. But the book also reads as an extended harangue against "sheeple" written on one long note of misanthropic smugness. Fortunately, the superb translation means that it's always exquisitely written smugness. **Andrew Osmond**

i A film version is in the works, with the same director who adapted Pelevin's 1999 book *Generation P* attached.



LEONARD

He lived long and prospered

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
275 pages | **Hardback/ebook**
Authors **William Shatner, David Fisher**
Publisher **Sidgwick & Jackson**

Leonard Nimoy's passing last February rocked countless thousands who'd never met him. How much more affecting must it have been for someone who knew him for decades? This tribute by his *Star Trek* co-star (subtitle: *My Fifty-Year Friendship With A Remarkable Man*) provides us with a little insight.

That subtitle isn't *entirely* accurate, mind. Though the two men worked side by side for three seasons, they didn't initially become close – partly because the Method-trained Nimoy tended to stay in character rather than fool around between takes; partly because of a couple of incidents where the two locked horns. It wasn't until 1975, when Shatner started attending conventions, that a meaningful friendship began to grow – one cemented in the '90s when Shatner lost his then wife to alcoholism, and was able to lean on Nimoy (himself an alcoholic for decades) for emotional support.

> "Flashes of Shatner's wit keep you reading"

It's difficult to know quite who is the ideal audience for *Leonard*. The people most likely to be interested – Trekkers – will find many of the anecdotes recounted here familiar from previous books. They may also be frustrated by some sloppy errors – Shatner thinks his *Trek* pilot was shot in black and white, that Chekov featured in the first season, and that Nimoy only featured in *Fringe* as a voice – which really should have been caught by his co-writer.

Occasional flashes of Shatner's lightly sardonic wit keep you reading, though. And the deep respect with which he discusses his former crewmate is touching – as is his bewilderment and sadness that the two fell out before Nimoy's death. There's no doubt this is a sincere attempt to honour his memory. For fans, however, one wonders if a more fitting way to do so might be to donate the cover price to a heart disease charity. **Ian Berriman**

i At conventions, Nimoy had one persistent rider demand: a pint of coffee-flavoured Häagen-Dazs ice cream.



THE LAST DAYS OF JACK SPARKS

Can Satan Get 1,000 Likes?

★★★☆☆

RELEASED 3 MARCH
389 pages | **Paperback/ebook**
Author **Jason Arnopp**
Publisher **Orbit**

Jack Sparks is a legend on his own timeline. A recovering drug addict, bestselling author and self-aggrandising social media star, he's on a mission to disprove the existence of the supernatural. Unfortunately, Sparks winds up attracting the hostile attentions of a demonically possessed teenager, as he investigates a mysterious YouTube video featuring a ghostly apparition.

The Last Days Of Jack Sparks attempts the tricky task of transposing the found footage genre to the printed page, and is written in the style of a work-in-progress manuscript by Sparks, with the occasional insert from a third party, added posthumously. The first half is the strongest, with Jason Arnopp creating an atmosphere ripe with menace, but the book flags in the second half. That's largely the result of Arnopp casting his net too wide. In addition to the demonic possession angle he throws in mental projections and time travel, until the plot trips over its own clutter. And the further Sparks becomes detached from reality, the more implausible it becomes that he's still working on his manuscript – his refusal to believe the evidence of his own eyes strains credulity to breaking point. **David West**

i To celebrate *Jack Sparks*, the author is releasing new books to download for free! http://bit.ly/freearnopp

BULLET TIME

A BOOK IN BULLET POINTS



DOCTOR WHO: 365 DAYS

RELEASED 10 MARCH
499 pages | **Hardback/ebook**
Author **Justin Richards**
Publisher **BBC Books**

- The book's full title is *Doctor Who: 365 Days Of Memorable Moments And Impossible Things*.
- Has an entry (usually about a page long) for every day of the year.
- This is usually connected to an episode that either aired or "took place" on that day (so "The Idiot's Lantern" is 2 June because of the Coronation).
- Side panels add further data: births and deaths; significant "firsts"; other episodes that aired.
- Some of these stats are *deeply* geeky – like the dates of appearances by cast members on *The One Show* forerunner *Nationwide*.
- The fact that *Who* has tended to be shown at certain times of year does necessitate some cheating, sadly – there's no reason to have an entry about the 1996 TV movie on 13 June, for example.
- You can find much of this information at http://bit.ly/onthiswho – well worth a bookmark!



Reviews



LOIS LANE: FALLOUT

Lois: the early years

★★☆☆☆

RELEASED 10 MARCH

304 pages | Paperback

Author **Gwenda Bond**

Publisher **Curious Fox Books**

The story of how teenage Lois Lane moved to Metropolis with her family, joined her school's Perry White-backed newspaper and wrote her first major story should be fascinating, right? Wrong. Something's seriously amiss with this book, which is not so much leaping tall buildings in a single bound as taking the stairs.

It's not dreadful; the writing's competent and there's the odd witty one-liner, though they're not quite up to *Buffy* or *Veronica Mars* levels. It's just... lifeless. There's no zip and pizzazz in this Lois. Worse, the story is so generic and well-worn that it's almost embarrassing. A VR game taking over people's minds? Really? Putting aside the fact this has been a staple of popular culture for decades – *Star Trek: The Next Generation* aired an episode about it in 1991 ("The Game") and it felt tired then – the fact that you can see every plot twist coming is unforgivable.

Still, there's a sweet subplot involving a guy in Smallville (cough), and if you're feeling *very* undemanding you might still enjoy Lois's adventures, despite the lack of originality. Just don't expect anything other than a filler episode of *Smallville*, circa season one.

Jayne Nelson

i You can download two short story prequels which introduce the teen Lois via http://bit.ly/loisstories.



UNITED STATES OF JAPAN

Dumbed-down Dick

★½☆☆☆

RELEASED 3 MARCH

384 pages | Paperback/ebook

Author **Peter Tieryas**

Publisher **Angry Robot**

Talk about good timing. This book arrives when the "Japan won World War Two" idea is at its trendiest for decades, thanks to the TV version of Philip K Dick's *The Man In The High Castle*. *United States Of Japan* is presented as a respectful tribute to Dick. Instead it's an insult.

Forget Dick comparisons; even as pulp fiction, this is abominably bad. The early chapters seem okay, establishing a world where Japan nuked America in 1948. Most of the book happens 40 years later, as two mismatched Japanese officers (a man and a woman) seek a missing general in the conquered country. He may be linked to an illegal computer game, which simulates a history where America won.

But the investigation quickly becomes ridiculous. The setting is supposedly a terrifying, beyond-Orwell police state, yet characters act in cretinously casual ways, right up until they get tortured and shredded. (The video nasty horror scenes feel inspired by a notorious Chinese torture film, *Men Behind The Sun*.) The plot, characters and world are boringly, humourlessly unbelievable, and by the time giant robots stomp onto the scene, you're already long past caring. **Andrew Osmond**

i In his day job coding for Sony's Imageworks, Peter Tieryas has worked on films like *Guardians Of The Galaxy*.

WHSmith

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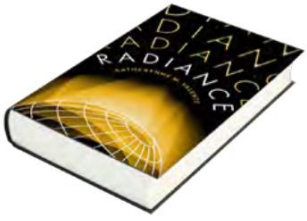
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RADIANCE

Rocketship romance

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
432 pages | Hardback/ebook
Author Catherynne M Valente
Publisher Corsair

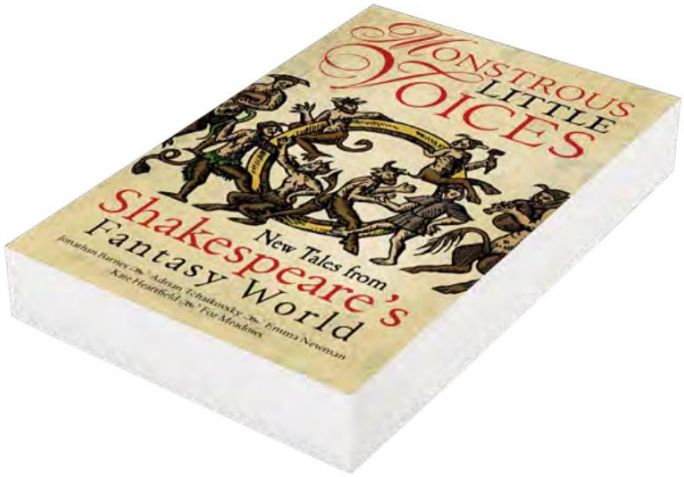
Some writers aren't interested in the easy route. Catherynne M Valente may have gained big success via her *Fairyland* series of children's books, but her adult fiction has always been ornate, weird and seriously demanding. Her latest effort is no exception, and is likely to be one of 2016's most distinctive genre novels – even if that distinctiveness isn't always an advantage.

Radiance is set in a retro-futuristic remix of the classic era of Hollywood, a pulp SF-influenced version of the early 20th century where the solar system has been colonised, and movie stars glide between the planets on Art Deco rocketships. The story follows the disappearance of famed documentary filmmaker Severin Unck, and explores her life and loves through a variety of sources, including archive film clips, interview transcripts and magazine articles.

The whole book is presented in this "found footage" style – although the effect ends up both bewildering and exhausting. Among all the metafictional game-playing, Valente has crafted beautiful imagery and packed every page with breathtaking invention, but *Radiance*'s fragmented narrative ultimately leaves it easier to admire than to enjoy.

Saxon Bullock

i One of Valente's influences for the central character was Drew Barrymore, as the daughter of a Hollywood family.



MONSTROUS LITTLE VOICES

Such stuff as dreams are made on

★★★★½

RELEASED 8 MARCH
297 pages | Paperback/ebook
Editor David Thomas Moore
Publisher Abaddon Books

2016 is the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, so this year will bring many commemorations of the Bard. This anthology is unlikely to be the most high profile of these, but it may just be one of the most fun.

The book consists of five linked novellas that play with Shakespeare's characters, settings and themes. And "play" is the operative word: these stories revel in both the conventions and the inventiveness of Shakespearean drama, reminding us how entertaining and subversive these plays were and can still be.

Foz Meadows' charming and challenging "Coral Bones" uses the cross-dressing of the comedies to explore gender identity, imagining *The Tempest*'s dutiful Miranda travelling to the court of fairy queen Titania from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in search of the freedom – and the magic – of a true self. In "The Course Of True Love", Kate Heartfield blends characters from Ovid's "Metamorphoses" – a key inspiration for Shakespeare – with Orsino and Oberon to tell a story of deception, shapeshifting and human/fairy war.

The two standout pieces – Emma Newman's and Adrian Tchaikovsky's – build upon these foundations, broadening out this war-torn, supernaturally-inflected Mediterranean world to include an immortal Macbeth, a scheming Prospero, and half the cast of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Newman's "The Unkindest Cut" has deliciously horrible fun with that old dramatic trope of the prophecy fulfilled by its characters' efforts to undo it, while Tchaikovsky goes full-on Jacobean in his dialogue and even breaks the fourth wall as he plunges a motley band of characters from various plays right into the middle of the warfare. Finally, Jonathan Barnes offers a bittersweet reflection on our many images of Shakespeare the man. Excellent stuff. **Nic Clarke**

i The book's title is a Bottom line from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which refers to the practice of boys playing female roles.



ELEANOR

If I could turn back time

★★★☆☆

RELEASED 10 MARCH
374 pages | Hardback/ebook
Author Jason Gurley
Publisher Harper Voyager

With more and more people going down the self-publishing route in recent years, in many ways it's remarkable that any single author can make themselves heard above the tumult. Jason Gurley's mainstream debut is one of a growing number initially self-published (in 2014) before being picked up by a "traditional" publisher.

Eleanor occupies the same sort of slightly uneasy genre space as Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* or Lydia Millet's *Oh Pure And Radiant Heart*: pretty writing, clunky mechanics. There are fantastical elements in this tale of a family devastated by loss over the course of three generations, but they are frustratingly fuzzy and unsatisfying.

Teenager Eleanor, left to care for her alcoholic mother after her father abandons them in the wake of tragedy, finds herself at the mercy of a force she can't control, which may be allowing her to travel in time, or between worlds. But it's the mundane world of cinnamon toast, empty whisky bottles and chilly rainstorms that feels more compelling and vivid. At times, the fantasy comes dangerously close to cheapening a heartfelt story; ultimately, it works better as metaphor than SF. **Nic Clarke**

i Gurley has also designed the covers for numerous books, including editions of Hugh Howey's *Wool*, *Shift* and *Dust*.

Reviews



BOOK OF LIES

Pants on fire

★★★½☆

RELEASED 24 MARCH
352 pages | Paperback
Author **Teri Terry**
Publisher **Orchard Books**

One of them always lies, and one of them always tells the truth. Nope, not a weird riddle designed to test your skills of deduction – just a description of the teenage narrators of *Book Of Lies*. Separated at birth, identical twins Piper and Quinn Blackwood are unexpectedly reunited at their mother's funeral. But their initial excitement turns to conflict as the girls realise that despite their shared genetics, they have almost nothing in common. Especially when it comes to figuring out their magical inheritance...

Alternating chapters give each twin the chance to tell her side of the story, but even so it's clear which one you're meant to side with. While Quinn gets a tragic backstory and complex, sympathetic personality, cool kid Piper is much less interesting, and her POV never quite rings true. As a result, you'll find yourself racing through her chapters to get back to Quinn's. And when the girls come into conflict, it's not hard to figure out who'll win.

If the interplay between the twins had worked better, this could've been brilliant – its mythology is compellingly strange, and its romance as creepy as it is charming. As it is, it's a fun, lightweight read that's a little too blatant about its anti-lie agenda. **Sarah Dobbs**

i Teri Terry's parents aren't to blame: her husband's surname is Terry, and she took it because the idea amused her.

REISSUES

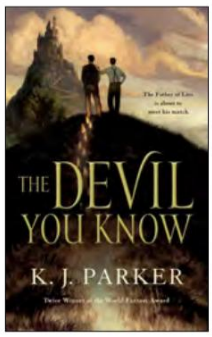
Titles out in paperback this month include **THE WATER KNIFE** (★★★★☆, 3 March, Orbit), Paolo Bacigalupi's first "adult" book since his Hugo-winning debut *The Windup Girl*. It's set in a near-future USA where, thanks to drought, water is now more valuable than gold, and follows various groups competing for the precious wet stuff. We said: "It's certainly exciting, with Bacigalupi proving adept at crafting showstopper setpieces... where it falls down is that it doesn't seem as radical or ambitious as *The Windup Girl*." Also getting another run out is Lance Parkin's **MAGIC WORDS** (★★★★½, 3 March, Aurum Press); subtitle – *The Extraordinary Life Of Alan Moore*. Don't expect scurrilous gossip about the beardy comics creator's personal life, as this is a biography very much focused on the work. We said: "*Alan Moore: Storyteller* covered much of this, but this volume beats it for the sheer level of detail... Throughout, Parkin is witty and informed. He's a devotee of Moore's work, but not uncritical." Finally, the latest entry in the SF Masterworks series of classic novels is Bernard Wolfe's weird, blackly comic 1952 satire **LIMBO** (10 March, Gollancz). Set in a dystopian 1990, 18 years after a nuclear holocaust, it revolves around a craze for pacifism which sees young men quite literally disarming by having their limbs amputated and replaced with prosthetics. Expect much discussion of philosophy and Freudian concepts, shamelessly awful puns, and some disturbing rape scenes.







STORIES AT THE RIGHT LENGTH



The Devil You Know
March 1st, 2016

"Satisfying . . . worth far more than the novella's modest price."
—Publishers Weekly



Forest of Memory
March 8th, 2016

Novella-length SF from a Hugo and Campbell winner.



Pieces of Hate
March 15th, 2016

An immortal assassin stalks a murderous demon through the ages.





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First Read

AN EXTRACT FROM A NEW BOOK

A GATHERING OF SHADOWS *by V.E. Schwab*

The much-anticipated sequel to the acclaimed *A Darker Shade of Magic*, a tale of blood magicians, fearless cutpurses, rapacious pirates and multiple Londons...

Delilah Bard, last seen taking ship for the adventure she'd always dreamed of in the world of Red London, has found herself in a tricky situation...

Delilah Bard had a way of finding trouble.

She'd always thought it was better than letting trouble find *her*, but floating in the ocean in a two-person skiff with no oars, no view of land, and no real resources save the ropes binding her wrists, she was beginning to reconsider.

The night was moonless overhead, the sea and sky mirroring the starry darkness to every side; only the ripple of water beneath the rocking boat marked the difference between up and down. That infinite reflection usually made Lila feel like she was perched at the center of the universe.

Tonight, adrift, it made her want to scream.

Instead, she squinted at the twinkle of lights in the distance, the reddish hue alone setting the craft's lanterns apart from the starlight. And she watched as the ship – *her* ship – moved slowly but decidedly *away*.

Panic crawled its way up her throat, but she held her ground.

I am Delilah Bard, she thought, as the ropes cut into her skin. *I am a thief and a pirate and a traveler. I have set foot in three different worlds, and lived. I have shed the blood of royals and held magic in my hands. And a ship full of men cannot do what I can. I don't need any of you.*

I am one of a damned kind.

Feeling suitably empowered, she set her back to the ship, and gazed out at the sprawling night ahead.

It could be worse, she reasoned, just before she felt cold water licking her boots and looked down to see that there was a hole in the boat. Not a large hole by any stretch, but the size was little comfort; a small hole could sink a boat just as effectively, if not as fast.

Lila groaned and looked down at the coarse rope cinched tight around her hands, doubly grateful that the bastards had left her legs free, even if she was trapped in an abominable dress. A full-skirted, flimsy green contraption with too much gossamer and a waist so tight she could hardly breathe and *why in god's name* must women *do* this to themselves?

The water inched higher in the skiff, and Lila forced herself to focus. She drew what little breath her outfit would allow and took stock of her meager, quickly dampening inventory: a single cask of ale (a parting gift), three knives (all concealed), half a dozen flares (bequeathed by the men who'd set her adrift), the aforementioned dress (damn it to hell), and the contents of that dress's skirts and pockets (necessary, if she was to prevail).

Lila took up one of the flares. Each was supposed to last a quarter of an hour, and the different colors had their own code on the open water: yellow for a sinking ship, green for illness aboard, white for unnamed distress, and red for pirates.

She had one of each, and her fingers danced over their ends as she considered her options. She eyed the rising water and settled on the yellow flare, taking it up and striking it against the side of the little boat.

Light burst forth, sudden and blinding. Lila spent half a minute cursing and blinking back tears at the brightness as she angled the flare up and away from her face. And then she began to count. Just as her eyes

The Author



Victoria Schwab is the bestselling author of *Vicious* and *A Darker Shade of Magic*, described as "a classic work of fantasy" by Deborah Harkness. It was one of Waterstones' Best Fantasy Books of 2015 and *The Guardian*'s Best Science Fiction novels. She suffers from a wicked case of wanderlust, made worse by the fact that wandering is a good way to stir up stories.

were finally adjusting, the flare faltered, flickered, and went out. She scanned the horizon for a ship but saw none, and the water in the boat continued its slow but steady rise up the calf of her boot. She took up a second flare – white for distress – and struck it on the wood. She counted the minutes as they ticked by, scouring the night beyond the boat for signs of life.

"Come on," she whispered. "Come on, come on, come on..." The words were lost beneath the hiss of the flare as it died, plunging her back into darkness.

Lila gritted her teeth.

Judging by the level of the water in the little boat, she had only a quarter of an hour – one flare's worth of time – before she was well and truly in danger of sinking.

Then something snaked along the skiff's wooden side. Something with teeth.

If there is a god, she thought, *a celestial body, a heavenly power, or anyone above – or below – who might just like to see me live another day, for pity's or entertainment's sake, now would be a good time to intercede.*

And with that, she took up the red flare – the one for pirates – and struck it, bathing the night around her in an eerie crimson light. It reminded her for an instant of the Isle River back in London. Not *her* London – if the dreary place had ever been hers – or the terrifyingly pale London responsible for Athos and Astrid and Holland, but his London. Kell's London.

He flashed up in her vision like a flare, auburn hair and that constant furrow between his eyes: one blue, one black. *Antari*. Magic boy. Prince.

Lila stared straight into the flare's red light until it burned the image out. She had more pressing concerns right now. The water was rising. The flare was dying. Shadows were slithering against the boat.

Just as the red light of the pirate's flare began to peter out, she saw it.

It began as nothing – a tendril of mist on the surface of the sea – but soon the fog drew itself into the phantom of a ship. The polished black hull and shining black sails reflected the night to every side, the lanterns aboard small and colorless enough to pass for starlight. Only when it drew close enough for the flare's dying red light to dance across the reflective surfaces did the ship come into focus. And by then, it was nearly on top of her.

By the flare's sputtering glow, Lila could make out the ship's name, streaked in shimmering paint along the hull. *Is Ranes Gast.*

The Copper Thief.

Lila's eyes widened in amazement and relief. She smiled a small, private smile, and then buried the look beneath something more fitting – an expression somewhere between grateful and beseeching, with a dash of wary hope.

The flare guttered and went out, but the ship was beside her now, close enough for her to see the faces of the men leaning over the rail.

"*Tosa!*" she called in Arnesian, getting to her feet.

Help. Vulnerability had never come naturally, but she did her best to imitate it as the men looked down at her, huddled there in her little waterlogged boat with her bound wrists and her soggy green dress. She felt ridiculous.

> "She counted the minutes as they ticked by, scouring the night beyond for signs of life"

"*Kers la?*" asked one, more to the others than to her. *What is this?*

"A gift?" said another.

"You'd have to share," muttered a third.

"What are you doing down there?" asked one of them.

"*Sensan*," answered Lila – *sinking* – which earned a laugh from the gathering crew.

A rope was flung over the side. She took hold and used it to guide her craft against the ship's side, where a ladder had been lowered; but before she could hoist herself up, two men came down and landed in the boat beside her, causing it to sink *considerably* faster. Neither of them seemed bothered. One proceeded to haul up the cask of ale, and the other, much to Lila's dismay, began to haul up *her*. He threw her over his shoulder, and it took every ounce of her control – which had never been plentiful – not to bury a knife in his back, especially when his hands began to wander up her skirt.

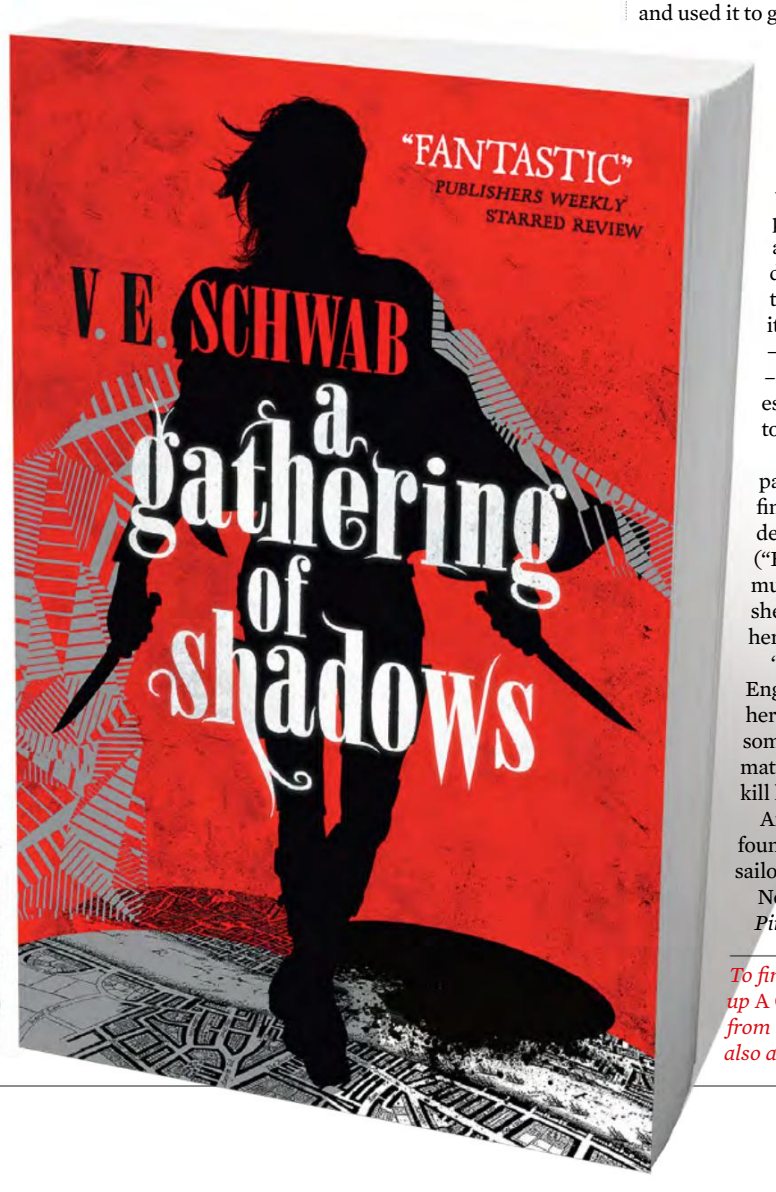
Lila dug her nails into her palms, and by the time the man finally set her down on the ship's deck beside the waiting cask ("Heavier than she looks," he muttered, "and only half as soft...") she'd made eight small crescents in her skin.

"Bastard," growled Lila in English under her breath. He gave her a wink and murmured something about being soft where it mattered, and Lila silently vowed to kill him. Slowly.

And then she straightened and found herself standing in a circle of sailors.

No, not sailors, of course.

Pirates.



To find out what happens next, pick up A Gathering of Shadows, *out now from Titan Books (RRP £7.99). Ebook also available. www.titanbooks.com*

ALL-NEW, ALL-DIFFERENT AVENGERS

Affirmative action

★★★☆☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
Publisher **Marvel Comics**
Writer **Mark Waid**
Artist **Adam Kubert**

ISSUES 1-4 **The Avengers have** traditionally fought on the side of the marginalised, the oppressed; ordinary folks on the wrong side of great power. So, in a year when representation in entertainment is a major talking point, it's pretty great that Marvel have assembled their most diverse line-up yet for their flagship title.

A Muslim teen (Ms Marvel), a black Captain America (Sam Wilson), a mixed-race Spider-Man (Miles Morales), and a female Thor (Jane Foster) join Nova, Vision and team leader Tony Stark (Iron Man) to form the new-look group – creating the most fun Avengers ever, with Vision the only true straight man in a super-team full of wisecrackers. It should be a triumph for inclusivity, if Marvel have the courage of their convictions.

But, putting aside politics for a second, the formation of the team is just one talking point in a book that has plenty. *All-New* is a fun, easy read, forming a perfect jumping-on point for anyone who hasn't been following the complex recent events of *Secret Wars*. The opening three-issue arc is full of gleeful moments. If Spidey surfing into battle on Iron Man's back doesn't make you punch the air, we can only assume you've recently had both arms broken.

The plot is basic, with Loki-like villain Mr Gryphon needing artefacts to open a portal to bring Chitauri warriors to Earth. Mark Waid's dialogue is banter-packed, which matches Adam Kubert's cartoony art perfectly. It's the sort of title we'd love to recommend to readers of all ages, but Marvel has slapped a T+ on the cover (ages 13+). This is a bit baffling, because it's not excessively violent, sexual, or sweary. Which brings us to the saddest aspect of *All-New*.

> *All-New* should be a triumph for inclusivity

This team should have come together like it was the most normal thing in the world but Waid peppers the book with criticisms from bystanders. "Not my Captain America..." in issue one; "Where are the real [Avengers]? Man, the world's getting so politically correct these days..." in issue four. Giving a voice to the book's inevitable detractors not only weakens its impact, but strengthens their (dumb) argument. Without this more adult element, perhaps *All-New* would have been rated more realistically, and all ages would be able to admire a group of people who now look just like they do. **Sam Ashurst**



Don't catch that scarf in the escalator...

All-New picks up eight months after *Secret Wars* and is, so Waid reckons, the first Avengers origin story since 1963.



With chips please.

SFX Loves

GOLDTIGER

A web of sin. *Do* go in

★★★★★

RELEASED **10 MARCH**
Publisher **Rebellion**
Writer **Guy Adams**
Artist **Jimmy Broxton**

BOOK **This richly imagined** spoof of/homage to British newspaper strips of the '60s (like *Modesty Blaise*) goes a long way beyond mere pastiche.

The book "collects" many three-panel episodes of *Goldtiger*, a sexy, violent comic by British thriller hack Louis Schaeffer and unstable Italian artist Antonio Barreti, about secret agents/swinging London fashion designers Lily Gold and Jack Tiger. But it also "interviews" people who were involved, presents paperwork tracing the history of the strip, and features excerpts from novelisations to fill gaps where episodes no longer exist... it's an absorbing experience.

By their nature those old newspaper strips were always fragmented, and *Goldtiger* cheerfully plays up to this with its missing episodes, stylistic shifts and plot jumps. But while the mood of the strip is brilliantly created, and it boasts many superb retro panels, following the story of *Goldtiger* isn't important. The "making of" provides the real story – and its elusive main character is Barreti, mainly glimpsed through correspondence and second-hand accounts. While Gold and Tiger are resolutely one-dimensional, he emerges as a fully-rounded, very funny and ultimately sympathetic character. **Eddie Robson**

Adams says Barreti was partly inspired by Spike Milligan, whose mental illness similarly "leaked out into his work".



She didn't take the "No" vote well.

RED THORN

Art Attack

★★★☆☆

- RELEASED OUT NOW!
- Publisher **Vertigo**
- Writer **David Baillie**
- Artist **Meghan Hetrick**

ISSUES 1-3 **Best known for** penning *Future Shocks* for *2000 AD*, David Baillie has now followed that familiar creative path leading to Vertigo for his first ongoing series, which draws on his Scottish roots.

The first issue opens with main character Isla Macintosh arriving in Glasgow to track down her missing sister. The city is effectively brought to life by Meghan Hetrick's vibrant, manga-esque art, and Baillie highlights not just its underlying mythology but also its rock and roll history. So it's almost disappointing when Isla crosses over to an alternate fantasy-style land ruled over by the ancient pagan demi-god Thorn.

Isla's quest to discover her sister's fate is swiftly sidelined as she becomes embroiled with Thorn, and Baillie throws too many elements into what's quite a heady mix, leaving some plotlines and characters frustratingly undeveloped. Isla is endowed with the ability to bring drawings to life, and it's revealed that one of them fatally stabbed one of her teachers, but three issues in no consequences for those actions have yet been mentioned.

Still, with such an intriguing central promise, *Red Thorn* is worth sticking with for the long haul; hopefully Baillie will pace his stories better in later arcs.

Stephen Jewell

Red Thorn's cast of creatures include murderous dwarves the Red Caps and a river demon called a Skellycoat.



Is it a plane? Er, yes.

SUPERMAN: AMERICAN ALIEN

Clark Life

★★★★☆

- RELEASED OUT NOW!
- Publisher **DC Comics**
- Writer **Max Landis**
- Artists **Various**

ISSUES 1-3 **If there's one character** we really *don't* need to see another "reinterpreted origin" for it's Superman, but DC's latest miniseries shows there are still interesting angles to explore on the Man of Steel's formative years. Instead of simply rehashing the classic origin story, *Superman: American Alien* is a collection of six standalone tales (each with a different artist) that focus on definitive moments in Clark's life, from his discovery of his flight powers to his first confrontation with criminals.

Written by *Chronicle* screenwriter Max Landis, *American Alien* is a grittier take on Superman's early years than comics fans are used to. However, while Landis adds rougher edges to Clark Kent's day-to-day existence, he also makes sure the character's essential decency still shines through.

He's helped in this by the artists who brilliantly capture the specific mood of each issue, from Nick Dragotta's energetic work depicting Clark's boyhood, to Tommy Lee Edwards's much more atmospheric and noir-ish portrait of Superman's teenage years. Three issues in, the anthology style is working well, matched with Landis's smart take on the characters and a more realistic approach to dialogue.

In fact, Landis gets so much right that it's a pity when he makes a few missteps, especially some overplayed moments of violence in the crime-based second issue. Nevertheless, so far this is one of the more interesting portrayals of Superman that we've seen for some time, and proof that DC is still capable of putting out adventurous superhero comics when they really try. **Saxon Bullock**

Landis's parodied Superman's convoluted death and resurrection in a 2012 short: http://bit.ly/deathreturn.



Well, he does taste like brandy biscuits.

PLANET OF THE DAMNED

Worlds of pain

★★★★☆

- RELEASED 10 MARCH
- Publisher **Rebellion**
- Writers **Alan Hebden, Pat Mills**
- Artists **Horacio Lalia, Pena, Alfonso Azpiri, Cesar Lopez Vera**

GRAPHIC NOVEL **The main** attraction in this double bill of late-'70s British SF comics about humans stranded on hostile alien worlds is *Planet Of The Damned*, which ran in the first ten issues of *2000 AD* sister title *Starlord*. Its credited writer – "RE Wright" – was actually Pat Mills in the first instalment, but Alan Hebden thereafter. It follows the passengers of a plane lost in the Bermuda Triangle as they battle for survival on a planet of acid lakes, murderous mutants and stranded Nazis. Sacrificing subtlety for thrills and cheerful brutality, its restless inventiveness hangs off a simple, satisfying quest narrative.

Also included is Hebden's *Death Planet*, drawn by Cesar Lopez Vera, which appeared in *2000 AD* around the same time. It uses a different pulp SF staple as its starting point – colonists heading for another planet crash on the wrong one – but thereafter it follows a similar path, killing off the colonists at regular intervals. However, there's a twist lying in wait, concerning a figure from the past of "ace space woman" Lorna Varn. Of the two, *Damned* is more fun, but this is terrific stuff, typical of the British SF comics boom. **Eddie Robson**

Alan Hebden followed in the footsteps of his father, Eric, who wrote numerous strips for war comics like *Commando*.

XCOM 2

Alien overload

SFX Loves

★★★★★

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**

Reviewed on **PC**

Publisher **2K Games**

VIDEOGAME **Humanity seems** doomed from the outset in *XCOM 2*. Earth's citizens live a coddled life under the totalitarian control of aliens and their co-opted soldiery, Advent. The resistance lives on only in the form of a few determined soldiers, scientists and engineers who have managed to repurpose a huge alien ship, the Avenger. This is your home, and you must fight back.

There's a rhythm of success and setback that makes this strategic masterpiece so gripping. Scarcity of opportunity forces you into difficult dilemmas and what you choose to do matters enormously. You need to recruit new rookies; you need an engineer to build a comms facility that will let you contact more territories; you need alien alloys to upgrade your weapons. You can't have all of these. You can probably only have one.

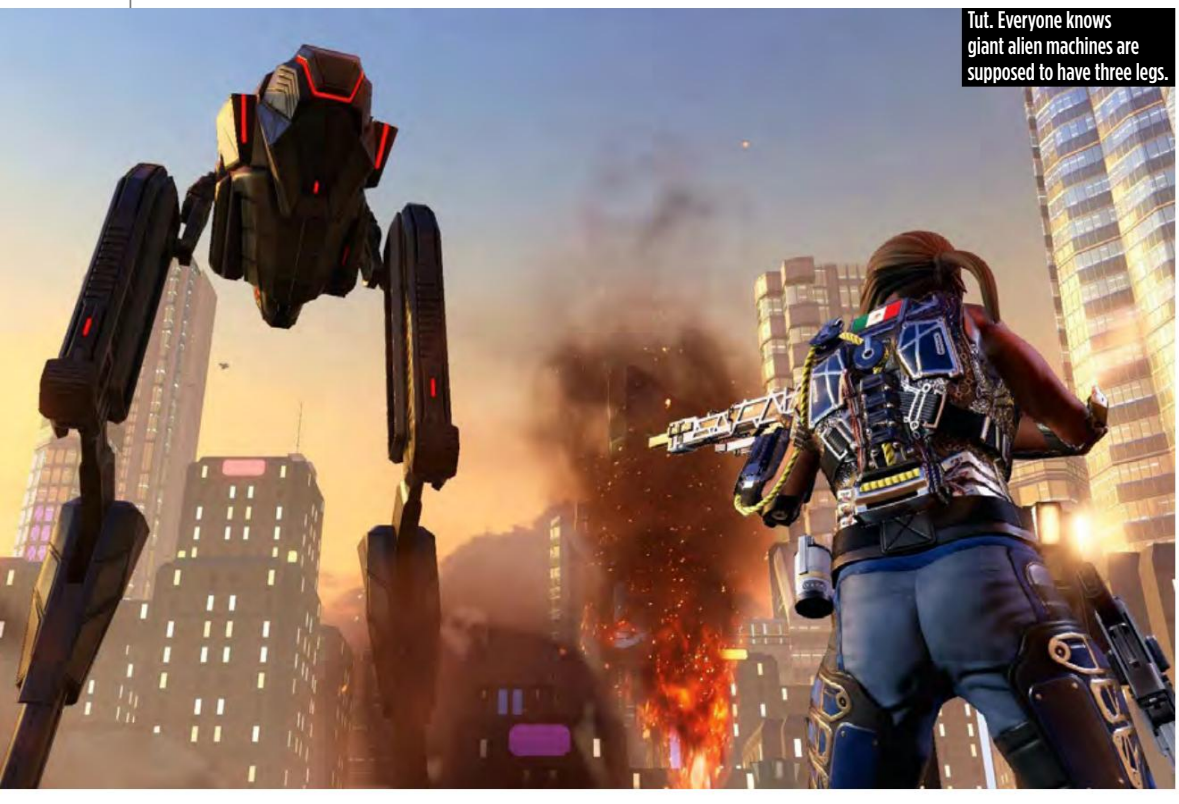
Combat is turn-based, and takes place on procedural battlefields that are uncannily well generated. For the vast majority of battles the terrain is busy, interesting and benefits from a huge leap in visual fidelity from prequel *Enemy Unknown*. The snowy forests, slums, city centres and alien bases are varied both in decorative assets and in the verticality provided by cliffs and multi-storey buildings.

You start most battles incognito, and can freely move around the map without being attacked, as long as you stay out of the detection range of enemies, lingering civilians and watchtowers. Once concealment is broken, life becomes much more difficult. Successful shots are dictated by chance rolls, and you secure favourable odds by staying in good cover and flanking. A poor move or a stroke of bad luck can wipe out a soldier, or take them out of action for days.

> "This is your home, and you must fight back"

There's very little to criticise here. The camera occasionally wafts through walls in close-ups; there's sometimes a lengthy pause before the character you're watching acts. A lack of foreknowledge in your first playthrough will force you to be more reactive than considered, though the constant flow of new enemy types and story missions makes up for that. But thanks to your varying starting position, procedural missions and tactical depth, *XCOM 2* can and should be played repeatedly. **Tom Senior**

i Unlike prequel *Enemy Unknown*, *XCOM 2* is a PC-exclusive title. So, er, sorry about that. It's a reason to own a PC, though.



Tut. Everyone knows giant alien machines are supposed to have three legs.



DOCTOR WHO: THE LABYRINTH OF BUDA CASTLE

Vamping it up

★★★★☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**

60 minutes | **CD/DOWNLOAD**

Publisher **Big Finish**

AUDIO DRAMA **"Doctor Who** versus Dracula!" – it's an irresistible pitch, and over the years we've seen multiple *Who*-related takes on classic vampire mythology. The latest example arrives in lively audio adventure *The Labyrinth Of Buda Castle*, which pitches the Fourth Doctor (Tom Baker) and Romana (Lalla Ward) against deadly bloodsuckers in 1979 Budapest.

Visiting the Eastern European city in search of a decent holiday, their plans are derailed by a mysterious series of attacks and a youthful vampire hunter. The clues eventually lead them to an ancient labyrinth occupied by the Hungarian military, where a dark force from the 15th century is once again threatening the world...

Balancing gothic chills with playful humour, Eddie Robson's script packs in healthy levels of invention and delivers a rounded and characterful adventure romp. The central sci-fi twist on vampires may not be shockingly original, but it's still interesting enough to drive the story forward, and engaging turns from both Baker and Ward help successfully capture the spirit of one of *Who*'s wittiest eras. **Saxon Bullock**

i Also out from Big Finish: *Infernal Devices*, the second volume of their War Doctor series starring John Hurt.

STAR WARS BLUETOOTH SPEAKERS

No match for a ghetto blaster at your side?

★★★★½

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**

Output **Two 3W drivers, 10W subwoofer**

Manufacturer **AC Worldwide**

TECH **The British company who** previously brought us a TARDIS-shaped speaker has now launched a new *Star Wars* range, which kicks off with C-3PO and a classic Stormtrooper helmet.

When first connected, the speakers announce themselves with samples from the films: C-3PO declares, "I do believe they think I am some sort of god!" while the Stormtrooper says, "You can go about your business. Move along... move along." They're both quite loud on boot-up, so beware!

Each unit features a rechargeable battery, a USB charging port and AUX-in for connecting to more traditional audio systems. Sound quality is good, with pleasing reproduction across the range and plenty of bass from the four-inch subwoofer. Things get a little shaky at high volume, but that's to be expected with speakers of this size and construction. Connecting with your phone, tablet or computer is easy over Bluetooth, and you can buy two matched speakers for £250, and pair them to provide detailed, room-filling stereo sound. (Pairing is the process of linking them via Bluetooth.)



The busts are both fan-pleasingly accurate, although as the larger of the two, C-3PO is the more impressive. The polished golden surface is eye-catching – and you even get a set of white gloves to prevent scuffs and scratches when transporting it around the house. The Stormtrooper helmet is nicely detailed, with physical grilles and panels, although it lacks the glossy, pure white surface of the original. We can easily see these speakers nestled amongst your beloved *Star Wars* models and figures, blasting out the Imperial March and not looking in any way out of place. **Steve Jarratt**

i A Darth Vader speaker is lined up for release in the summer, with Boba Fett and R2-D2 models planned to follow.

UNRAVEL

Knit's landing

★★★★☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**

Publisher **EA**

Reviewed on **PS4**

Also on **PC, Xbox One**

VIDEOGAME ***Unravel* isn't the** cloying slice of indie whimsy you were expecting. It occasionally lapses into treacly sentimentality, but there's an edge to this picturesque puzzle-platformer from developer Coldwood. It's there in knitted protagonist Yarny, who sits in the intersection of the creepy/cute Venn diagram alongside the Moomins. It's most obvious, however, in the myriad ways he can meet his end.

> "There's an unfakeable sincerity of feeling"

Unravel has a lot in common with the brutal *Limbo* – though it's not quite as dark and violent. You'll break branches to float across water and weigh down see-saws to create ramps. There's even a hair-raising setpiece in which you must escape a pursuing creature. And you'll regularly find yourself dangling from ropes, shifting your weight back and forth to generate enough momentum to carry you across yawning gaps.

The key difference is that you're supplying your own threads, with Yarny attaching himself to loops of red wool. This can be a temporary measure, or you can tether yourself more thoroughly. Binding two nearby loops will often create a trampoline, and they double as makeshift bridges, allowing you to ferry moveable items towards platforms beyond Yarny's reach.



Seconds later he was eaten by moths.

It's when it mixes things up that *Unravel* most delights. Most of its puzzles are satisfying to solve, given the total absence of hints and visual cues. Sure, it's hardly string theory, but even when the solutions are more obvious the game frequently compensates with visual wit and invention.

If its narrative sometimes leans towards the predictable, it comes across as heartfelt rather than manipulative. *Unravel* isn't always as sure-footed as it might be, but there's an unfakeable sincerity of feeling behind its message. **Chris Schilling**

i Coldwood's Martin Sahlin devised Yarny on a camping holiday, making a poseable doll out of old wire and some borrowed yarn.



COLLECTABLES

What we've been playing with this month

1 Gwendoline Christie's Captain Phasma was somewhat short-changed in *The Force Awakens*, with minimal screentime, even less dialogue, and an involuntary trip down a garbage chute. Still, there's no denying that her shiny silver Stormtrooper armour looks ace, so this classy monochrome **Star Wars Messenger Bag** (FPI price £24.99; product code C9176) is a cut above the average tie-in merch. Should you wish, you can complete the Phasma look with a wallet (C9175) and toiletry bag (C9179) both featuring the same design.

2 Fancy seeing Batman in all the colours of the rainbow (well, nearly)? These **Batman Dorbz** figures (FPI price £8.49 each; product codes D2864, D2865, D2868, D2869, D2870, D2872) come in orange, green, blue, purple and pink. They're just the tip of the iceberg of a range which also includes cutesy spins on the likes of the Joker, the Penguin and the Riddler. Incidentally, a similarly rainbow-coloured six-pack of regular action figures is coming out later in the year. Hmm. It's almost like Batman is trying to tell us something deeply personal, but can't quite spit it out. Mate, we all guessed *years* ago.

3 There are two things troubling us about this **Flexible TARDIS Chopping Board** (FPI price £8.99; product code C5156). Firstly, as dedicated *Doctor Who* fans we're slightly irked by the shade of blue, which is several shades too bright; police boxes are navy blue, damn it! Secondly, the thin, bendy material it's made of doesn't look awfully sturdy – and we have seen some reports of people complaining that their chopping knife sliced into it straight away.

All products are available at
forbiddenplanet
international
home shopping
www.forbiddenplanet.co.uk
01621 877 222



Maybe you just need to have a gentle touch.

4 Gotham City's about to experience a population explosion with the latest wave of figures from the **Batman The Animated Series/New Batman Adventures range** (FPI price £19.99 each; product codes B9229E, C3648, C3649, C3650). Here Robin takes a stand for justice against botanically-inclined banditress Poison Ivy, original jester-style Harley Quinn and the none-more-creepy combo of Killer Croc and Baby Doll. You can also pick up stunt-queen Roxy Rocket and her favourite mode of transport (FPI price £29.99; product code C5727). All figures come accessorised to within an inch of their little plastic lives.

5 Whoever designed these highly poseable **The Walking Dead 6" Action Figures** (FPI price £16.99 each; product codes C9690, C9691, C9692, C9693, C9701) – series eight of the range based on the TV show – clearly has a pretty morbid sense of humour. Tyreese comes with a bloody, detachable arm, while Bob Stookey is packaged with his own barbecued leg! Mmmm, barbecued leg... Also pictured: an armour-clad Eugene; Dale, complete with deckchair and rifle; a grizzled Rick Grimes with blood on his face and grey in his moustache; and a masked Morgan.

6 It's all about the 'tache. Yes, this **Batman 1966 Vinyl Idolz Joker** (FPI price £16.99; product code D3292) faithfully retains Cesar Romero's weirdly whited-out upper lip fuzz (as dedicated Batfans should know, the actor refused to shave off his top-lip-warmer for the role) – and quite right too. His eyes were never quite as manically bulbous though – this fella's are like Marty Feldman's on poppers! A dapper purple suit, snot-green hair and yellowy teeth round off a solid statuette of the mischief maker – nice shiny shoes too. Vinyl Idolz figures of Batman, Robin and Batgirl are also available. None come with a whited-out moustache.

THINGS TO COME

More goodies on their way soon



ANNABELLE DOLL

Traumatise kids with this *The Conjuring* collectable, which faithfully replicates the creepy haunted doll from the horror franchise. She stands 18" tall, at least a quarter of which seems to be made up of terrifying bulging eyes. *Aaaargh!*



FLOATING MILLENNIUM FALCON

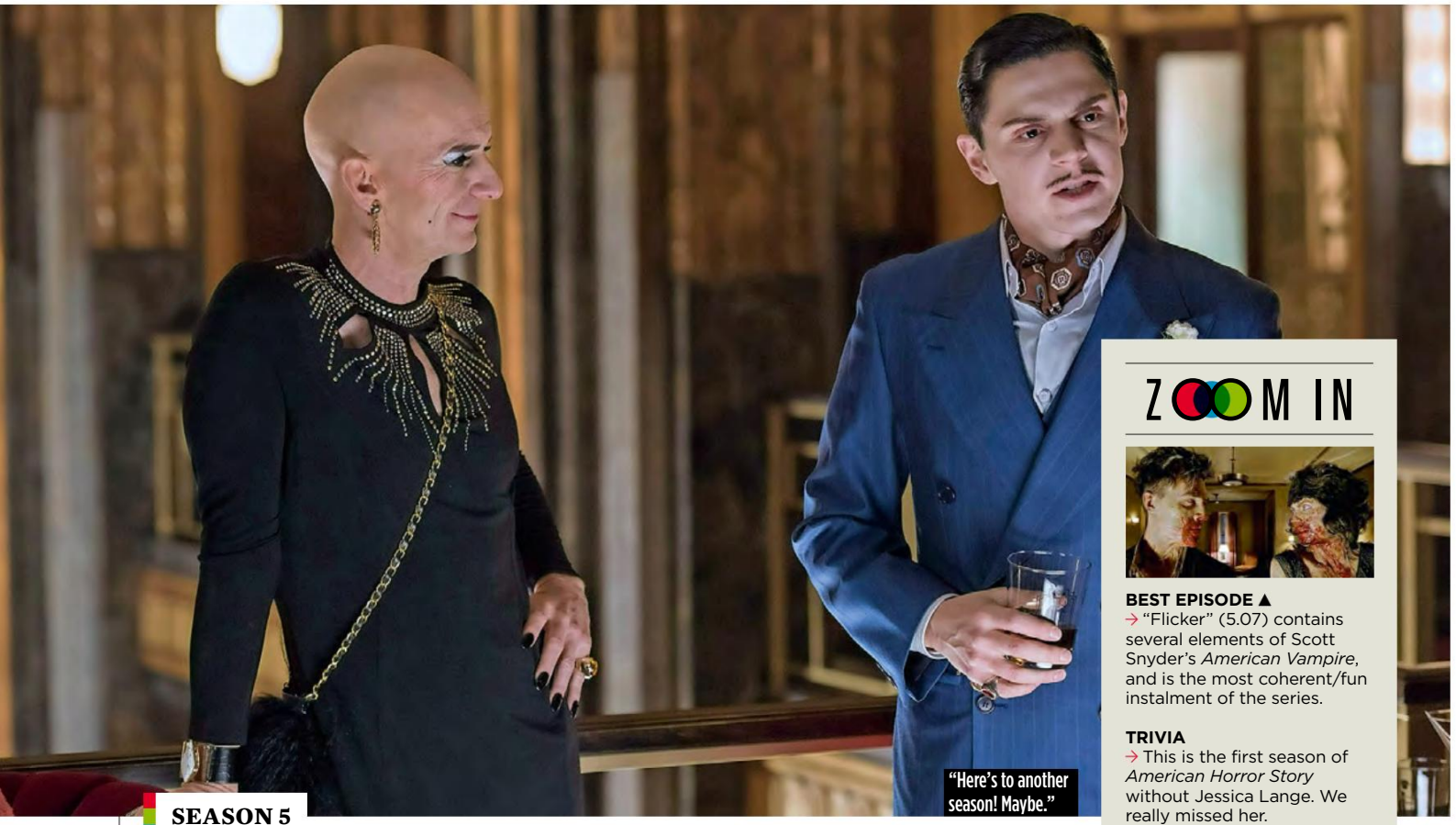
What witchcraft is this?! This replica of Han's bucket of bolts (as seen in *Empire*) floats in the air via electromagnetic attraction and repulsion – or so the makers claim. We strongly suspect they are warlocks.



JUDGE FEAR FIGURE

"Gaze into the face of Fear!" Inspired by Brian Bolland's art, this figure of *2000 AD*'s Dark Judge is about 17cm tall, and comes with suitably ghoulish accessories – such as one of the bear traps he likes to toss at his hapless victims.

Photography by Olly Curtis



"Here's to another season! Maybe."

SEASON 5

AMERICAN HORROR STORY

Check-out time?

- UK Broadcast **Fox, finished**
- US Broadcast **FX, finished**
- Episodes Reviewed **5.01-5.12**

According to writer-creator Ryan Murphy, *American Horror Story: Hotel* was inspired by a viral video of a woman being pulled into a hotel lift (by ghosts) before vanishing. That's a fairly literal elevator pitch. And, if he's not careful, it could be a good metaphor for the franchise as a whole.

Despite the fact that a hotel seems the perfect place for Murphy's spook-show to set up shop (*AHS* loves a fixed location populated by ephemeral characters, whether it's a haunted house moving through eras, an asylum, a witch's coven, or a circus) this time he seems to treat the location less like a scary B&B, and more like an all-you-can-eat buffet.

American Horror Story generally doesn't so much throw thoughts at the wall to see what sticks as it does dump buckets of brains onto a building until it caves in. This usually means a near-impossible amount of obscure references, horror homages and crazed characters are to be expected when embarking on new season. But, this year, the ideas overwhelm the narrative.

The high-concept – vampires, ghosts, creepy kids and serial killers (and ghosts of creepy serial killers) reside in an LA-based hotel which looks like it was carpeted by Stanley Kubrick – is solid enough.

But, for the first time ever, *American Horror Story*'s audience isn't offered a single fully sympathetic soul to follow, with only a trail of broken people and blood-drained bodies leading the way through the show's maze-like corridor of endless plot-twists and baffling character turns.

The closest we get to a likeable

ZOOM IN

BEST EPISODE ▲
→ "Flicker" (5.07) contains several elements of Scott Snyder's *American Vampire*, and is the most coherent/fun instalment of the series.

TRIVIA
→ This is the first season of *American Horror Story* without Jessica Lange. We really missed her.

IT'S WOSSERNAME!
→ Gabourey Sidibe cameos in "Battle Royale" (5.11), returning as Queenie, her character from *American Horror Story: Coven*. She's fab.

RATINGS
→ *Hotel* started well, but slumped to 2.89 million US viewers over the course of the season. Compared to *Freak Show*'s 3.85 million, that's a disappointment.

BEST MOMENT ▼
→ In "Devil's Night" (5.04), John Carroll Lynch plays murderer John Wayne Gacy. He eats dinner opposite the Zodiac killer. Lynch also played a suspect in David Fincher's *Zodiac*.



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Lady Gaga bagged a Golden Globe for her Countess Elizabeth.

lead is hotel owner Lady Gaga's glam-vamp Countess Elizabeth, and she ends the opener having killed a couple of innocent hipsters she picked up at a pop-up screening of *Nosferatu*. So, probably not the first person you'd put on your wedding list.

Supporting players have potential audience appeal, but are either so sidelined (Denis O'Hare's astonishing Liz Taylor) or mishandled (Angela Bassett's wasted blaxploitation star turned vamp-warrior Ramona Royale) that they're frustrating for fans.

Sure, the show is exciting to begin with – the thrilling first episode feels like it was crafted at 3am during a fever-dream, with enough iconic introductions, monstrous moments and wide-eyed wailers to fill an entire series. Unfortunately, you can only maintain that pace for a limited time before you run out of breath. *Hotel* gets to the halfway point of the season and collapses of a heart attack. Viewing figures subsequently sank over the course of the season, with fans getting on at the penthouse level and stepping off long before they hit the basement.

> "Gets to the halfway point and collapses of a heart attack"

With Murphy now focusing on his new show *American Crime Story*, there was every reason to suspect season five could've been *American Horror Story*'s last ever year. A character even exclaims in the final episode, "It was supposed to be the perfect ending!"

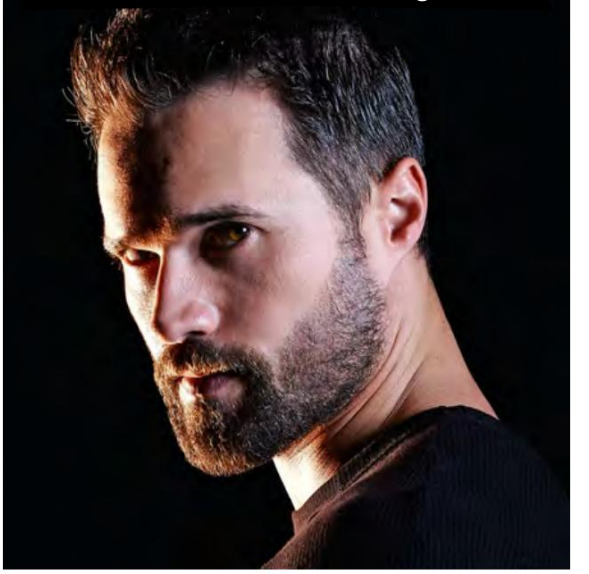
Perhaps to right the fact that the conclusion isn't quite so perfect, Murphy's rumoured to be returning for a sixth outing. He's apparently again looking to the internet for inspiration, using eerie meme phenomenon Slender Man as a starting point. Let's hope this means less flab on the show's bones next time. **Sam Ashurst**



Don't worry, it's not real. OR IS IT?

★ BEST IN SHOW ★

The characters who make TV great



GRANT WARD

From boring to mind-blowing – and **Agents Of SHIELD** viewers never saw it coming

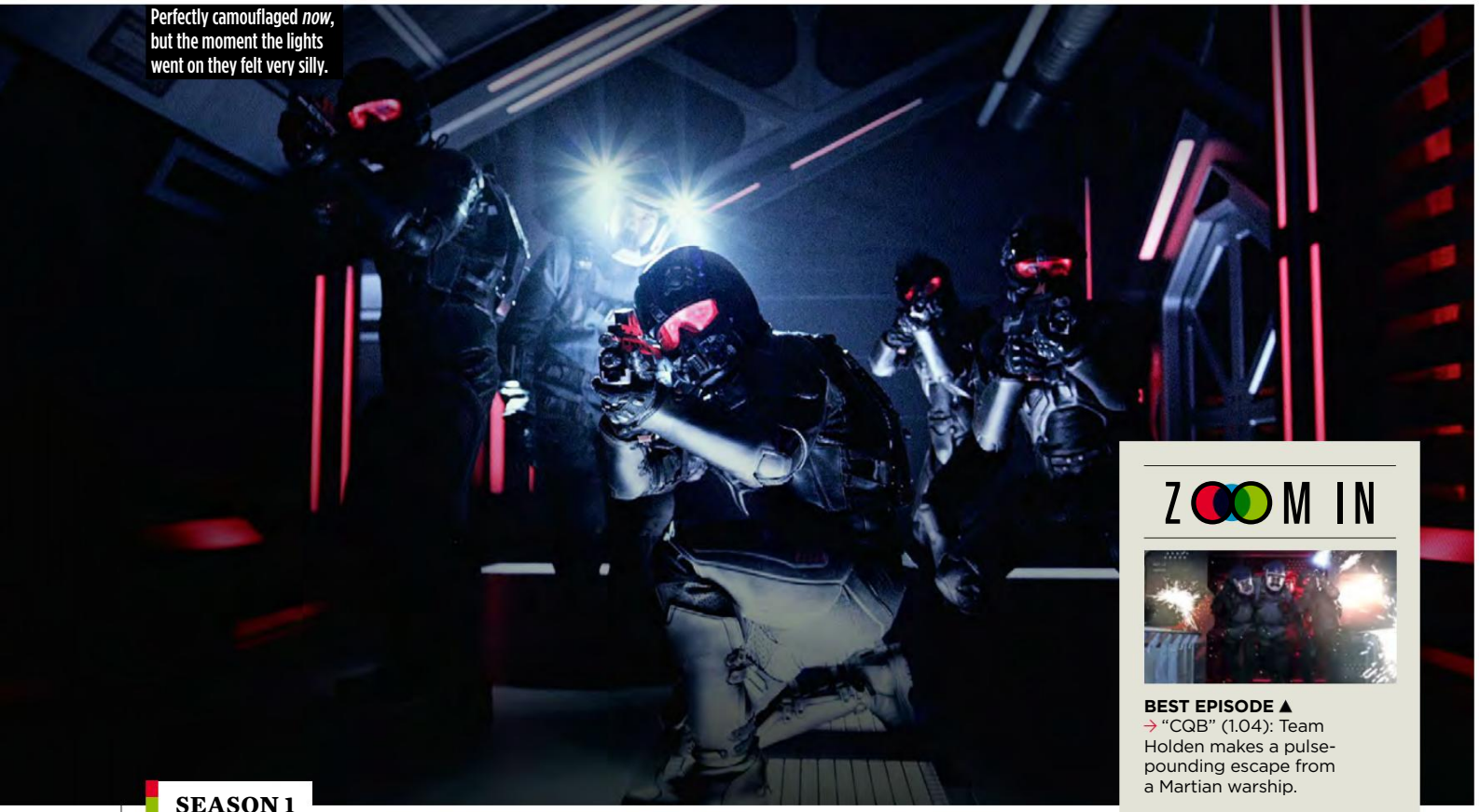
UK Broadcast **E4, Sundays** ▸ US Broadcast **ABC, returns 8 March**

Did you just spit out your coffee when you saw the subject of this month's column? Did you snort: "Are they kidding? *Him*?" If so, chances are you're one of the many people who gave up on *Marvel's Agents Of SHIELD* in its first year, most probably before the show dropped its spectacular, end-of-season bombshell that its most dull character – handsome, generic good-guy Agent Grant Ward – was actually a double-agent who'd been working for Hydra all along. So that means you've missed all the fun and games since... And boy, have there been some fun and games.

Right from the off, Ward seemed to serve two functions: to provide some kind of possible romantic foil for new SHIELD recruit Skye, and to kick ass. Sure, he'd crack a quip or two, and seemed like a nice guy, but it is a truth universally acknowledged that "nice" doesn't always make for good drama – there's a reason most bad guys in popular culture have more fans than the heroes. And so Ward's shocking transformation was actually one of this series' defining moments: when *Agents Of SHIELD* showed us what it could really do.

As an ice-cold killer, Evil Ward is perfect. Kudos to Brett Dalton, who subtly changed the way he stood, the way he moved his head and the way he spoke from "American jock" to "snake-like psycho". Sure, Evil Ward has a romance in season two which doesn't quite convince – and the old "you killed the woman I love, therefore I will kill you" trope ain't exactly fresh – but he still oozes magnetic menace. Oh, and the twist midway through season three promises to make him even more intriguing...

Agent Ward is now one of the best things in *Agents Of SHIELD*; sometimes, badder *is* better. **Jayne Nelson**



Perfectly camouflaged *now*, but the moment the lights went on they felt very silly.

SEASON 1

THE EXPANSE

The solar system's territories are teetering on war

- UK Broadcast **TBC**
- US Broadcast **Syfy, finished**
- Episodes Reviewed **1.01-1.10**

Let's not beat around the bush: *The Expanse* is the new *Battlestar Galactica*. That's the kind of snappy soundbite that journos and PR people love but such comparisons are usually superficial. In this case, however, the similarities are striking. Both shows are from the US Syfy channel. Both shows transpose current political issues into a science fiction arena. Both shows have a strong religious theme. Both shows have an appeal way beyond Syfy's usual audience.

This is the point in the critical narrative when the "However..." should appear. *The Expanse*, surely, cannot match the magnificence of that earlier show?

Well, no, it doesn't. Not yet at least. But, crucially, it also doesn't fall far short, and there's every indication that future seasons could raise the bar.

Besides, *The Expanse* is no mere *Battlestar* wannabe. It's also a product of more recent TV drama trends for multiple parallel strand storytelling à la *Game Of Thrones*. Set in a future where man has colonised the solar system, the show highlights the tensions between three main territories: Earth (which is a bit sci-fi *House Of Cards*-y), Mars (which we haven't seen much of in season one but seems a bit *Starship Troopers*-y) and the Belt (where it's all a bit *Blade Runner*-y). There's mutual mistrust and animosity. War is one tiny inciting incident away.

One central mystery focused on an abandoned ship connects three disparate characters; a hauler, a grizzled cop and politician. The way their various plotlines converge later in the season forms the basis of this multilayered show.

It's certainly an ambitious, glossy looking series, with some impeccable world-building and top-notch performances. The effects are excellent, the attention to detail brings this future to life and the various mysteries and politicking keep things compelling.

Occasionally the storytelling becomes bogged down in information overload and some secondary characters seem to have been generated by rolling dice, but mostly *The Expanse* delivers an action-packed and thought-provoking first season. **Dave Golder**

ZOOM IN

BEST EPISODE ▲
→ "CQB" (1.04): Team Holden makes a pulse-pounding escape from a Martian warship.

MOST UNEXPECTED SPECIAL EFFECT
→ The Angel Moroni statue tethered to the spaceship LDSS Nauvoo has to be one of the most extraordinary images in the show.

THE BASICS
→ This first season is based on *Leviathan Wakes*, the first book in James SA Corey's *The Expanse* series, though Chrisjen Avasarala's debut has been brought forward from the second book.

DID YOU SPOT?
→ In "Back To The Butcher" (1.05) Miller visits a nightclub called Tech Noir, which was also the name of a nightclub in *The Terminator*.

BEST MOMENT ▼
→ In "Salvage" (1.08), Miller and Team Holden's storylines converge in a bloody, brutal battle in a scuzzy hotel foyer on Eros.



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LINE UP

The month's most quotable dialogue

RAY PALMER
"He's a time master from the 22nd century, it's a little hard to google."
Legends Of Tomorrow, Episode 1.01



SAM
"Turns out Harold was stealing the other residents' Viagra."

DEAN
"I know. A real dick move, huh?"
Supernatural, Episode 11.11



JARVIS
"Aside from Danger, my middle name is Charming."
Agent Carter, Episode 2.01



MULDER
"How do you know that?"



SCULLY
"I'm old school, Mulder. Pre-Google."
The X-Files, Episode 10.02



CISCO
"I think we found the next target for our 30-something, meta-human, not-a-Ninja-Turtle."
The Flash, Episode 2.10



SCRIPTEASE

A TV season distilled

SEASON 2

THE LIBRARIANS

A mysterious case of the star who keeps vanishing



- UK Broadcast **Syfy, finished**
- US Broadcast **TNT, finished**
- Episodes Reviewed **2.01-2.10**

HEAD LIBRARIAN FLYNN and GUARDIAN EVE chat in the Library annexe while LIBRARIANS: THE NEXT GENERATION mess about in the background doing bantery stuff.

FLYNN
So, we found the Warehouse... sorry Library, again at the end of season one but it's a really expensive, CG-enhanced set designed for when this series wasn't on every week.

ARTY ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN
Banter banter banter Michelangelo...

EVE
Yeah, let's just use the annexe again this year after a few establishing shots.

SCIENCEY ASSIS. LIBRARIAN
Banter banter banter square root...

FLYNN
Talking of money saving, I'll be doing my customary vanishing act for half the episodes again.

THIEVING ASSIS. LIBRARIAN
Banter banter banter cocky...

EVE
Where do you actually go?

ARTY ASSIS. LIBRARIAN
Look... the library's clipping book is alerting us to this year's arc plot.

FLYNN
I audition for *Doctor Who*. That's why I dress like Bertie Wooster's idiot brother.

SCIENCEY ASSIS. LIBRARIAN
Fictional characters are coming to life!

EVE
You've no chance.

ARTY ASSIS. LIBRARIAN
This clipping says we got a *Groundhog Day* episode coming up.

EVE
Nah, because the next Doctor will be an Asian lesbian. About time too.

SCIENCEY ASSIS. LIBRARIAN
Cool. *Groundhog Day* episodes are always fun.

FLYNN
I could try method?

SCIENCEY ASSIS. LIBRARIAN
Cool. *Groundhog Day* episodes are always fun.

THIEVING ASSIS. LIBRARIAN
Here's another clipping calling us to London to solve a case involving Dorian Gray. That'll be pants.

FLYNN
Maybe if we look like we're trying to be *Doctor Who* people'll stop saying we're like *Warehouse 13*.

ARTY ASSIS. LIBRARIAN
Hey Flynn, when are you going to stop hogging the limelight?

FLYNN
You do know the viewers prefer me pratting about to the episodes where you lot get "emotional" moments?

THIEVING ASSIS. LIBRARIAN
Maybe, but you're not in the *Groundhog Day* episode and that one kicks serious butt.

EVE
Hang on, it was sciencey assistant librarian's turn to get a line.

SCIENCEY ASSIS. LIBRARIAN
That's okay. I did two in a row for the sake of the only vaguely funny gag in this whole feature.

Dave Golder

SFX's SPURIOUS AWARDS

Celebrating the silliest and strangest moments from the month in TV



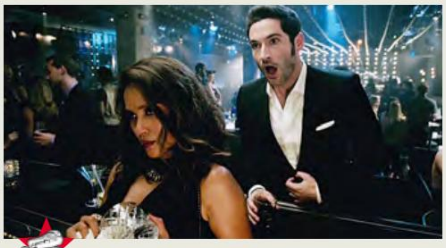
UNEXPECTED GUEST STAR OF THE MONTH

Worzel Gummidge turns up in Saxon times. He appears to have his First Doctor head on in *Beowulf: Return To The Shieldlands*.



COSPLAY OF THE MONTH

Beowulf's Thane of Herot, Rheda, decides to go to San Diego Epic Poem Con in her Scarlet Witch costume.



"I THINK I'VE JUST COME" OF THE MONTH

If you've seen *Lucifer* you'll know what's going on here with Maze. But did you notice Lucifer being "serviced" too?



PLEA OF THE MONTH

We feel for this guy in *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*: "I don't wanna die! I'm still on the second season of *Game Of Thrones*!"



SELFIE OF THE MONTH

In *Lucky Man* there's dodgy selfies and dodgier poetry: "G is for gorgeous, you even looked good in the bath."



BOARD GAME OF THE MONTH

Peggy meets the man who created the game Mouse Trap while he's working on a prototype in Marvel's *Agent Carter*.



"PREVIOUSLY ON..." OF THE MONTH

The X-Files summed up 10 seasons with a Mulder voiceover and somebody flipping through old photos. Which immediately introduced a new conspiracy – who took all the photos?



EMBARRASSING BODIES OF THE MONTH

Teen Wolf Scott really needed to rub some ointment in that.



DAD DANCING OF THE MONTH

Awesomely embarrassing sit-down dad dance in *The Flash*.



SPORTING EVENT OF THE MONTH

A pair of Shadowhunters play table football in a graveyard.

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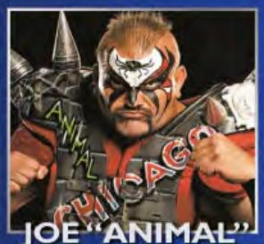
NOEL CLARKE — DOCTOR WHO

VIRGINIA HEY — FARSCAPE

JEMMA REDGRAVE — DOCTOR WHO



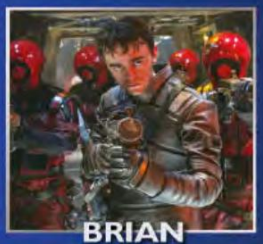
RICCO ROSS — ALIENS



JOE "ANIMAL" LAURINAITIS — WRESTLING LEGEND



TOM BURKE — THE MUSKETEERS



BRIAN VERNEL — STAR WARS



VERNON WELLS — MAD MAX 2



SIMON FISHER-BECKER — DOCTOR WHO



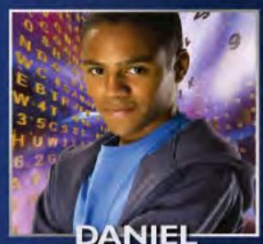
DANIEL KASH — ALIENS, THE STRAIN



AARON AYAMAH — STAR WARS



FRAZER HINES — DOCTOR WHO



DANIEL ANTHONY — S J ADVENTURES

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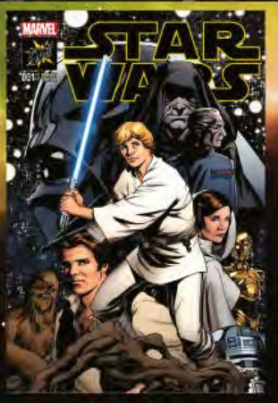
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"This wasn't a typical zombie book!"
S K GREGORY, AUTHOR OF DAEMON PERSUASION

Darcy was just a normal teenager, enjoying the summer after finishing her A-levels with her boyfriend, Alec. Until the night strange creatures began falling from the sky, infecting the people around them and transforming them into crazed cannibals…

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Blastermind
The SFX quiz

THE AVENGERS

Twenty brainteasers on Steed and co (not Tony Stark's lot)

Quizmaster: ***Russell Lewin, Production Editor***

QUESTION 1

What was the name of the song that Patrick Macnee and Honor Blackman recorded in 1964?

QUESTION 2

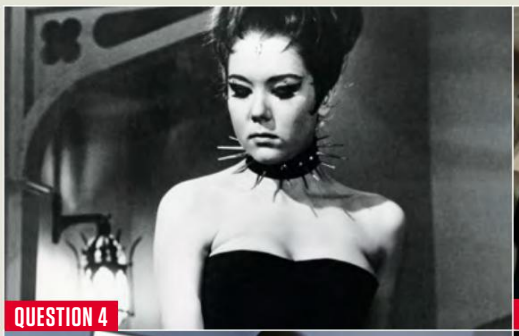
Patrick Macnee died in 2015, in the same month as which other actor who happened to be the same age as him?

QUESTION 3

And on his death, who tweeted "Fare thee well, Patrick Macnee – an Avenger before it was fashionable"?

QUESTION 4 PICTURE QUESTION

Name the *Avengers* episode in which Mrs Peel wears this outfit.


QUESTION 4

QUESTION 5 PICTURE QUESTION

Which way does Steed like his tea stirred, according to Mrs Peel – clockwise or anti-clockwise?


QUESTION 5

QUESTION 6

In *The New Avengers*, who or what was Emily?

QUESTION 7

What links *New Avengers* episode "Obsession" with Brian Clemens' other series *The Professionals*?

QUESTION 8

The 1998 *Avengers* movie was nominated for nine Razzie Awards. How many did it win?

QUESTION 9

Who plays Mother in the '98 film?

QUESTION 10

What other name should be at the end of the following names: John Wickham Gascoyne Beresford .....


QUESTION 15


QUESTION 19

QUESTION 11

"Mrs Gale, how nice of her to remember me. What can she be doing at Fort Knox?" Explain the meaning behind this line of Steed's in a 1965 episode.

QUESTION 12

The Avengers was also made into a radio series. But in which country was it made?

QUESTION 13

"Game", "Fog", "Invasion Of The Earthmen". Which season of *The Avengers* includes these three stories?

QUESTION 14

What was the oxymoronic title of the first ever *Avengers* episode?

QUESTION 15 PICTURE QUESTION

Dr Clement Armstrong created which army of robotic menaces?

QUESTION 16

Avengers episode "The Girl From AUNTIE" had which actress in the title role?



QUESTION 17

Which *Avengers* actress has been in *Doctor Who* and *Game Of Thrones* and was also a Bond girl?

QUESTION 18

And which *Avengers* actress is now 90 years old?

QUESTION 19 PICTURE QUESTION

In *The New Avengers*, what is Purdey's second name?

QUESTION 20

True or false: *Avengers* creator Brian Clemens' son Samuel Clemens told the BBC the last thing his father did before he died was watch an episode of *The Avengers*.

Answers

1 "Kinky Boots" 2 Christopher Lee 3 Kevin Smith 4 "A Touch Of Brimstone" 5 Anti-clockwise 6 A car 7 Martin Shaw and Lewis Collins appear in it 8 One (Worst Remake or Sequel) 9 Jim Broadbent 10 Steed. It's his full name 11 It's from 1965 episode "Too Many Christmas Trees" – Steed says it to Mrs Peel – and is a reference to previous co-star Honor Blackman who at the time was filming *Goldfinger*, which has scenes at Fort Knox 12 South Africa 13 The final season (1968-69), the Tara King one 14 "Hot Snow" 15 The Cybernauts 16 Liz Fraser 17 Diana Rigg 18 Honor Blackman 19 Trick question! She doesn't have one 20 True

How did you do?

Which *Avengers* supporting actor are you?


→ **0-5** Eddie Izzard


→ **6-10** Tom Adams


→ **11-15** Lewis Collins


→ **16-19** Warren Mitchell


→ **20** Peter Cushing

© KOBAL (2), REX (3)

Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi



SUPERHERO T-SHIRTS

Russell Lewin, Production Editor

Look at those photos. Cute, huh? Well, as you might have guessed, that little guy is me, back in that weird and wonderful decade known as the 1970s. And of course the one thing that these snaps have in common is that they feature me wearing t-shirts with a superhero on them.

See, there's Captain America, there's Spider-Man (my favourite), there's the Hulk, and a DC interloper, Batman. I just loved those guys back in those days. The comics were the starting point, and back in the '70s I'd buy the black and white British ones, which were reprints of the all-singing, all-dancing, all-colour US comic books, which I'd yet to realise even existed at that point.

But even if I hadn't even read the comics I suspect I would have been wearing those t-shirts anyway because, let's face it, it's not unusual for little kids to be clad in superhero-branded clothing. They don't all grow up to write for science fiction magazines, though, and edit a couple of *SFX* superhero specials.

So, that got me thinking: what was my degree of love for these tops? Was I just doing what other kids were doing, or was I indicating my future life path? I think my love was deep. Something primal even.



Obviously bright colours appeal to youngsters – superhero creators know that, and that's why they make them luminously garish.

Maybe because I loved such t-shirts when I was young, when I was older I'd associate images like these – bold, brash, colourful – with the happiness of childhood. And so *that* must be the reason I dislike washed-out, adult-orientated, dreary superhero stuff! *That's* why imagery from the likes of *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice* gets me down!

It's funny to think, I was a walking art gallery; I was adorned with beautiful art that would later be seen in galleries and on expensive prints. Those polyester, easily stretched tees had imagery very much of their time, and they represent the sunny, the optimistic, the positive, before superhero comics went all gloomy and grown-up and PC. To me, they represent the absolute golden age of superhero comics.

I wonder whether the ultimate proof that we want things back from our childhood even though we can do nothing useful with them is that I really, *really* wish I still had these t-shirts.

Nowadays Russell only has Marvel pyjama trousers (true!).

Fact Attack!

→ **Stan Lee said he learned from EC Comics chief Bill Gaines the importance of getting your product on as much merchandise as possible.**

→ **The work of the artists seen on the Marvel t-shirts here belongs to John Romita and Jack Kirby, two of the titans of 20th century superhero art.**

→ **A quick scan of eBay reveals a sad dearth of these sort of tees. But there was a vintage *Superman The Movie* one for around 20 quid.**

→ **In the 1970s Russell enjoyed two holidays in France, two in Spain and one in Greece! His first ever trip abroad was to Ibiza in 1972.**

SEE YOU NEXT MONTH!
30 MARCH
DETAILS ON PAGE 45

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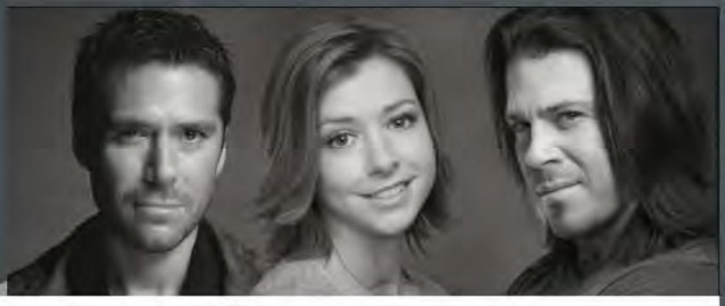
INSURGENCE 8

The Vampire Diaries & The Originals

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All actors appear subject to work commitment.

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